



Elders Council of Newcastle response to the 'Newcastle Plan' Consultation

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Introduction

The Elders Council¹ recognises that, in any city plan, the sustainable common good must be paramount. Addressing health and social inequalities and existential threats to collective wellbeing such as climate change must decisively shape the plan's goals, priorities and specific policies. It must be noted that the common good is often not the same thing as the sum total of individual preferences. A model of a durable and resilient city, one serving everyone's long-term interests, must be based on a sound model of the key elements of addressing inequalities, sustainable lifestyle choices and sustainable technologies used to supply goods and services.

That said, the Elders Council would underline that those over 65 constitute nearly 10% of the city's population, a figure that is still growing in absolute numbers and as a percentage of city residents. They have a range of specific needs and concerns, ones that must be actively addressed within comprehensive planning for the future. In other words, a 'sustainable city' must also be an 'age-friendly' city.²

It also has to be noted that past policies, local, regional and national, have tended to marginalise older citizens and their requirements.³ A whole range of problems remain or have worsened such as loneliness, health inequalities, inadequate housing, 'fuel poverty', mobility challenges, and unsatisfactory transport options. We note that, under the heading 'Partnership Approach', there is a 'Plan for Young People' but no plan for older people.

The council documents stress what a land use plan can and cannot do. Yet they also make clear (page 2 of 'About the Plan') that the Newcastle Plan is linked to a number of other strategies (eg 'Anti-Poverty'). The comments from the Elders Council of Newcastle are made in the light of such a wider approach. We summarise our response below.

Summary of key points

1. Elders Council welcomes the priority being given to making Newcastle a healthier city in which people can age well and reach older age in good health;
2. Major focus to be given to the reduction of air pollution and to protection during heat waves (tree cover etc);
3. Creation and maintenance of green spaces and safe walking routes to them, with an emphasis on peace, quiet and verdant environments;

¹ <https://www.elderscouncil.org.uk>

² <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/politics-and-government/age-friendly-communities/> ; <https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/age-friendly-cities-framework/> ; <https://ageing-better.org.uk/age-friendly-communities/eight-domains> ; <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360132321003267>

³ https://ageing-better.org.uk/the-state-of-ageing-2023-4?gad_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIr47t0tCvhAMVJ5hQBh1JrwhsEAAAYAiABEGJySPD_BwE

4. New housing developments and conversions to include provision for older citizens, not least those seeking to 'rightsize'. Such properties to be created near *existing* facilities such as shops and near good public transport links. Housing for older people does not necessarily need to be specialist housing. Better designed, accessible, quality housing can provide the flexibility to meet our needs at any age and enable us to continue living in neighbourhoods we are familiar with;
5. A far better deal for pedestrians including maintenance of pavements and more frequent crossing times at pedestrian crossings;
6. Emphasis to be put on reliability and safety, as opposed to speed in transport planning;
7. More provision of accessible seating and of public toilets in the city centre and suburban centres;
8. An Age Friendly City Strategy to be added to the supplementary strategies (see above)

Supporting Evidence and Arguments



We will comment on the preliminary material published by the Newcastle City Council in its preparation for the final plan submission by following the 9 'ambitions' it sets out.

First, however, we would stress the need to make public consultations accessible to older citizens. It would be wrong to assume, for example, that everyone has access to a computer or uses a smart phone.

It would seem reasonable to have all documents accessible **in hard copies** in some convenient location such as the central library and/or civic centre. Perhaps a small space at a venue such as the Farrell centre could be set aside for such material, including high quality maps and details such as local land ownership. Public information about who owns what is vital if there is to be full transparency about pressures for particular developments in particular places.

Having said that, the presentation of the Newcastle Plan proposals are much more accessible than in previous years and easier for lay people to engage with. We also note that there are some face-to-face engagement opportunities.

The listed ambitions will, at first sight, appeal to many residents, not just older ones. There is, of course, the likelihood of different interpretations of what particular words and phrases imply in terms of actual policy. Furthermore, some ambitions would seem to harbour contradictions, e.g. between economic growth and environmental protection.⁴

Similarly, a focus on 'high-tech' jobs may not offer many opportunities to those without relevant qualifications, many of whom will be over 50. Certainly, all the ambitions need to have clearly identified effective

⁴ There is **no** evidence of the possibility of an absolute and sustained 'decoupling' of economic growth, however managed, from negative and unsustainable environmental impacts.

mechanisms to ensure that they are consistently pursued and achieved in meaningful time frames.

In public consultations, there is the added danger that all that emerges is a wish list detached from due consideration of the sustainability of related social, economic and environmental impacts. The solution would seem to be the development of an arching framework through which to judge what goals are both feasible and compatible.

It would also help if the council evidence basis were to include a rich set of exemplars of better practices taken from cities and towns, not just in the UK but also from around the world. These would be ones that not only demonstrate what is being sought but also show that there are positive ways in which to plan for the future.⁵

Avoiding ageism

The following comments are made by an organisation representing a particular demographic in what is often called an 'ageing society'. This term should be reframed more positively. We are a longer-living society. That is to be celebrated, not treated as some sort of curse. The country's older people have given many years to building our society.

In retirement, most continue to contribute to the social fabric. They are not a 'burden'. They offer a wealth of experience and knowledge. They are a real resource for the whole of society. They contribute to the economic and social life of their communities in all sorts of ways, from unpaid caring for grandchildren to voluntary work in the field of sports, charity work and many other productive activities. Just because something is unpaid does not mean it is not highly valuable. A fair few older people, of course, continue in paid work.

The sustainable common good needs all these contributions.⁶

⁵ Eg <https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/who-network/>

⁶ Here is a particularly cheering example, albeit from Vienna: https://reasonstobecheerful.world/senior-loneliness-vienna-microbrewery/?utm_source=Reasons%20to%20be%20Cheerful&utm_campaign=af1aeb14f2-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_11_22_04_40_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_89fb038efe-af1aeb14f2-389492796&fbclid=IwAR2puB1pbiUoZzyamOkRHxalOghAu8KrvkiEWKdGG-pQhCxyXKB5O59NFAE

Specific comments on the 9 'ambitions'

1. Health

- i. Many older people in particular need **easily accessible facilities**, from health care centres and pharmacies to libraries, shops and community facilities.
- ii. Walkable spaces with good access to green spaces and public transport help us to maintain our health and independence as we age.
- iii. Health is not just about physical and mental wellbeing in the negative sense of an absence of ailments but also includes sometimes less tangible but vital elements. They include respect, dignity, independence and the feeling of being valued. Well-designed spaces which make it easier for older people to move around independently can help to nurture respect and inclusion.
- iv. **Loneliness** can induce many mental health problems. So, 'community-building', with attractive local spaces where people can meet, even just pass by on safe streets, is particularly important. Thus, access to parks and green space is particularly important.⁷ The current 'Core Strategy' has significantly failed to deliver here.
- v. In terms of avoidable illnesses and deaths, older people are disproportionately affected by **air pollution**,⁸ much of which comes from road vehicles, though in some areas wood burning stoves are also a problem.⁹ For example, traffic-generated air pollutants seem to be a significant contributor to dementia.¹⁰ A whole range of traffic calming, and overall traffic reduction measures are needed in all parts of the city.¹¹
- vi. Older citizens also tend to suffer particularly badly from the increasingly frequent and more intense **heat waves** being created by climate breakdown¹² Tree planting to create shade

⁷ https://www.lewis.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/04/Seniors-and-Parks-8-28-Print_reduced.pdf

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<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4311079/#:~:text=Elderly%20people%20will%20most%20likely,the%20health%20of%20the%20elderly.>

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/feb/14/wood-burning-stoves-cancel-out-fall-particulate-pollution-uk-roads#:~:text=A%20rise%20in%20harmful%20emissions,the%20UK%2C%20government%20data%20reveals.>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/feb/21/air-pollution-could-be-significant-cause-of-dementia-even-for-those-not-predisposed#:~:text=Air%20pollution%20from%20traffic%20is,predisposed%20to%20it%2C%20research%20suggests.>

¹¹ <https://globaldesigningcities.org/publication/global-street-design-guide/designing-streets-people/designing-for-motorists/traffic-calming-strategies/>

¹² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/12/europe-heatwaves-disastrous-older-people-people-disabilities>

will be vital.¹³ We need to think in terms of 'cool cities' in this context of overheating weather patterns.¹⁴

- vii. But equal effort must be put into preserving the city's existing trees. That includes individual trees as well as hedgerows, copses and woodland. Many local citizens rue what happened at Woolsington Woods, on land neighbouring Havannah nature reserve, and around Fenham allotments. In these locations, and indeed a number of others, there have been major losses of tree cover and hedgerows.
- viii. Older people tend to spend more time in their homes as they age, so a good quality, accessible warm home becomes more important to us as we age.¹⁵

2. A greener city

- i. This ambition is largely about energy and CO2 emissions whereas, we suspect, many people will interpret "Greener City" in terms of the matters under Ambition 9 ("Natural Environment").
- ii. Many senior citizens fully appreciate the threats posed by the depletion of the planet's resources and degradation/disruption of its life-support systems. Older people are anxious about the effects of these changes on the lives of their children and grandchildren and want to contribute to developing solutions. A small example is the way in which Elders Council members have taken advantage of opportunities to convert to heat pumps and share their experiences to encourage others.
- iii. We note that the declaration of a 'climate emergency' by the council and reference to it in the Newcastle Plan documentation. But it is hard to see commensurate actions that could be called an emergency response. It would surely be appropriate that a radical plan emerges after the consultations. There are a number of models to emulate.¹⁶
- iv. The Plan itself focuses very one-dimensionally on just CO2 emissions (as in its posing of 'net zero') but they are but one element of the climate crisis which, in turn, is but one symptom of a far more general ecological crisis, whose existence is now well documented. For example, many members of the Elders Council have witnessed in their lifetimes the explosive growth in the use of plastics and the consequent crisis of 'plastification'. They have experienced a major oil crisis and its effects (1973): they can appreciate how destabilising 'supply shocks' can be. At the same time, many grew up in communities where values of 'make do and mend' and 'waste not, want not' were common. Such

¹³ <https://time.com/6252307/planting-trees-prevent-heat-wave-deaths/>

¹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/feb/23/botanical-gardens-most-effective-green-space-at-cooling-streets-in-heatwaves>

¹⁵ reference tbc re the impact of poor quality homes on health

principles are contradicted by the scale of waste evident all around us today, one symptom of which is the scale of litter and fly-tipping that pollutes many localities.

- v. It is not a matter of possible dangers in, say, 25 years' time. The ecological crisis is the all-important fact of life right now. All parts of the Newcastle Plan should be formulated and delivered with due recognition of that reality. It is not just another thing to be considered, amongst many, but the overriding and all-pervading one. Again there are some good models in terms of broad sustainability local plans.¹⁷
- vi. In light of the emerging crises mentioned above, it would seem unwise to base plans on evidence drawn from recent years. The future is likely to be very different, with a whole host of environmentally, economically and socially driven disruptions and discontinuities.
- vii. The Consultation stresses 'mitigation' and 'adaptation'. Perhaps, in the face of such huge uncertainties and possibly sudden and unexpected changes, 'resilience' must be a core goal of any plan.
- viii. The 1.5 degree target threshold now seems to have been broken so, in that respect the Consultation papers are out of date.¹⁸
- ix. We note that there has been considerable criticism of the merits of the 'net zero' concept. Perhaps it ought not to be used as if it is unproblematic.¹⁹
- x. Part of the evidence base ought, then, a model of the 'metabolism' of Newcastle, specifically the nature and scale of its dependence on inward flows of energy and raw materials. Related to the point is the need to avoid false environmental accounting. Newcastle would not be a true 'net zero carbon' city if it is not considering 'ghost' acres appropriated elsewhere (e.g. factories in the Far East generating CO2 to supply goods to Newcastle.)
- xi. Far more emphasis ought to be placed on resource conservation and better waste management in the Newcastle Plan. Recycling rates in Newcastle are generally poor. The city is ranked at 188 out of 338 in terms of local authority performance.²⁰
- xii. Existing recycling facilities are small in number and only accessible by car for most people. We need a dense network of collection points for both reusable and recyclable materials, perhaps using empty

¹⁷ Eg <https://www.beesmart.city/en/smart-city-blog/ljubljana-a-smart-green-and-sustainable-city#:~:text=Ljubljana%27s%20green%20credentials%20are%20widely,natural%20resources%20and%20green%20space.> Freiburg is another stimulating example: <https://www.greencitytimes.com/freiburg/> So too is Paris: <https://www.timeout.com/paris/en/things-to-do/paris-green-sustainable-city-plan-2030>

¹⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-68110310#:~:text=For%20the%20first%20time%2C%20global,to%20the%20EU%27s%20climate%20service.>

¹⁹ <https://www.wri.org/insights/net-zero-ghg-emissions-questions-answered#:~:text=The%20%20net%20aspect%20of%20net,reductions%20in%20the%20near%20term.;> <https://theconversation.com/climate-scientists-concept-of-net-zero-is-a-dangerous-trap-157368> ; <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/net-zero-carbon-pledges-have-good-intentions-but-they-are-not-enough/>

²⁰ <https://www.letsrecycle.com/councils/league-tables/2020-21-overall-performance-2/>

properties in some cases. We need far greater ambition here. There are some good exemplars to follow.²¹

- xiii. There seems to be no consideration of the option of tool libraries to greater resource conservation and lower cost of living. Older citizens often have the knowledge and experience to be particularly useful volunteers here.²²
- xiv. Current kerbside collection seems to be plagued with problems with, for example, many wheelie bins missing lid, wheels and glass caddies. Recyclable material can often be contaminated by glass. Litter in the back lanes in some parts of the city is appalling and clearly needs a new approach to tackling how people dispose of household waste.
- xv. While the Elders Council has no formal position on waste incineration, we would note widespread public opposition. Certainly, there would seem a contradiction between resource conservation and what some call 'energy-from-waste' since the latter obviously needs constant inputs of waste materials, much of which could be reused or recycled.²³
- xvi. There is a link to Ambition 7, Housing, that is especially important. A major plan to reduce the problem of 'cold homes' would have major environmental benefits (saved energy resources and reduced pollution) whilst leading to big gains in terms of human health, lower bills (reduced poverty) and indeed general equity.²⁴ Action is indeed urgently needed, not least for older residents stuck in damp, draughty accommodation.²⁵
- xvii. Generally there is a need to reduce the environmental impact of new housing and renovations of existing building.²⁶
- xviii. Overall, it might be better to avoid vague terms about 'natural environment' and 'sustainable development'. A forward-thinking Newcastle Plan would focus instead of the emerging science of ecological footprinting.²⁷

²¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/13/how-san-francisco-became-a-global-leader-in-waste-management.html> ; <https://www.triplepundit.com/story/2013/belgium-hosts-europes-best-recycling-and-prevention-program/55266> ; https://zerowastecities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/zero_waste_europe_cs5_ljubljana_en.pdf ; <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/friday-fun-how-create-tomorrow-s-green-cities-today-s-garbage/1050616/>

²⁵ <https://evidencehub.northeastlep.co.uk/report/energy-efficiency-of-housing>

²⁶ https://ribabooks.com/Local-Sustainable-Homes-How-to-Make-Them-Happen-in-Your-Community_9781900322768

²⁷ <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/cities/>

3. Attractive city and neighbourhood centres

- i. The thread here might be the '15 minute city'.²⁸ It stresses 'access by proximity', having good facilities within easy reach by walking, wheeling or cycling. It is linked to radical traffic calming measures and a network of pocket parks and other greenspaces. The city centre would become more a cultural and major administrative hub, with more specialist retail than 'ordinary' stores.
- ii. We note the work done by Newcastle University.²⁹ A number of cities have already embarked on this journey,³⁰
- iii. There has of course been a rise in opposition to such thinking, often linked to 'conspiracy theories'. But there are ways in which this could be tackled.³¹
- iv. We would stress how the appeal of both the city centre and neighbourhood centres can be limited for older people if there are poor or even non-existing seating and public toilet facilities.
- v. Neighbourhood centres that are also 'transport corridors', with large numbers of noisy, polluting vehicles passing through eg Gosforth High Street and the West Road are scarcely attractive. It is of course a hard problem to resolve. Wider pavements might help, especially ones free from lots of obstructions.
- vi. The 'pedestrian pound' is widely underestimated.³² This underlines the need to prioritise the pedestrian option and, wherever possible, make walking to shops, cafes, and other such facilities is much more attractive option.
- vii. With regards to the 'retail hierarchy' mentioned in the plan, it must be noted that small local stores are particularly important for older people who often just buy a small number of items. The offers at big supermarkets where one has to buy more to get a special offer disadvantage such shoppers.
- viii. The Plan is right to note the impact of on-line shopping on local 'high streets' and small-scale retailers. Yet the latter have not been helped by past council policies to create American-style malls such as St James, Kingston Park, Heaton retail 'parks'. The latter are overwhelmingly car-dependent, contradicting other Ambitions, particularly No 2, contained in the Plan.
- ix. Clearly, dereliction, often accompanied by litter and vandalism, is a major enemy of vibrant neighbourhoods. Perhaps the Plan might

²⁸ https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Carlos-Moreno-The-15-minute-city?language=en_US

²⁹ <https://nclurbandesign.org/is-newcastle-a-15-minute-city/>

³⁰ <https://www.wri.org/insights/paris-15-minute-city> ; <https://eurocities.eu/stories/barcelona-shapes-the-future-of-city-planning/> ; https://www.theplan.it/eng/whats_on/the-15-minute-city-milan-focuses-on-its-suburbs-for-a-polycentric-future

³¹ Eg <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264275124000921> Can't open this

³² <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/2t0hyzcm/pedestrian-pound-2018.pdf>

envisage more pro-active use of CPOs and EDMOs to address the problem, with the utilisation of such properties for housing, 'pop-up' activities or community group usage.³³

- x. Changes in energy prices or tax enforcement could reduce the volume of on-line retail and van deliveries. There are examples of initiatives where local 'high streets' have been revived so nothing is set in stone.³⁴
- xi. It is possible to 'green' the buildings that house shops, cafes, music venues and other such provision. The transformation of Gosforth Civic Theatre is a striking example that could be more widely emulated across the city. The sealing off of side streets to create space for pocket parks might also help.
- xii. The city centre presents its own problems. Some streets such as St Mary's Place and parts of Northumberland are something of an obstacle course for older citizens: badly sited litter bins and other 'clutter' plus uneven surfaces.³⁵ There needs to be more work to make them a more pleasant and safer experience.
- xiii. The Plan talks of "places for all ages" and "vibrant meeting places". Perhaps this may be contradicted by its assumption that "other methods of travel (to neighbourhood centre) by ... e-cycles, skateboards, or scooters" are automatically compatible with such goals.
- xiv. Generally, there are major barriers from other factors such as business rates and rents. The Plan can scarcely transform the situation but all possible measures to help should certainly be explored.
- xv. That said, there do seem to be many initiatives that could be taken to enhance neighbourhoods.³⁶

³³ <https://www.no-use-empty.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-powers-do-local-authorities-have/>

³⁴ Eg <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/mar/29/high-street-closed-betting-shops-york-back-from-dead>

³⁵ <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/path-inclusive-footways>

³⁶ <https://newsociety.ca/books/s/superbia?sitedomain=ca>



4. Employment opportunities

- i. Although the Elders Council represents people who, in the main, are retired, we recognise that in the future people will be working longer and later in life. Useful work, whether paid or voluntary is the backbone of communities. Many jobs are poorly paid, involve 'anti-social hours' and can even be dangerous. The value to society in terms of good or services provided is not always evident.
- ii. Volunteering can provide vital outlets for older people as well as provide real service to society. Those between 65 and 74 provide the biggest pool of volunteers.³⁷ Evidence can be seen in local parks and nature reserve, hospitals, schools, certain libraries (e.g. Jesmond) and indeed many other places.
- iii. Therefore, the Elders Council would advocate a broad interpretation of what is 'employment', not restricting it to formal paid work.
- iv. The Newcastle Plan should, then, try to stimulate, as far as it is able, opportunities for voluntary work.
- v. We would look for yardsticks such as 'quality of life' indicators³⁸, rather than conventional metrics such as ones merely measuring commercial transactions (notably GDP and GNP). The latter often mask real declines in individual wellbeing, community strengths and ecological sustainability. 'Loneliness' is not captured by, say, GDP figures but it is an issue that really concerns many older citizens.³⁹ It is surely a

³⁷ <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/uk-civil-society-almanac-2023/volunteering/what-are-the-demographics-of-volunteers/#:~:text=Rates%20of%20informal%20volunteering%20at,those%20aged%2075%20and%20above.>

³⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Quality_of_life_indicators An alternative is: <https://www.centreforthrivingplaces.org>

³⁹ <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/evaluation/>

significant problem to be addressed in any planning that has the ambition of genuine progress.

5. Moving Around

- i. The Elders Council would stress how many senior citizens do not have **access to a private car** for reasons of cost, health (e.g. visual impairment) and simply personal choice. Yet investment heavily discriminates in favour of this single transport mode at the expense of more sustainable options.⁴⁰ Newcastle is no exception, as can be seen in the investment in the road infrastructure (e.g. widening of the A1 bypass) compared to spending on, say, more attractive walking environments.
- ii. Part of the evidence base should be a thorough assessment of the full costs of transportation. That would include land take. We assume it is very large, as can be seen at big junctions, major car parks, car salesroom lots and, of course sites such as Newcastle airport. The cost of repair and maintain of local transport systems would also be vital data for future planning. So too would the many other factors to take into account, such as accidents, congestion, reliability, air and water pollution, noise, splintering of human neighbourhoods, severance of biodiversity corridors, and direct killing of wildlife.
- iii. Though the **consultation** document puts walking at the top of its hierarchy of transport modes, *in practice* the **pedestrian** has routinely been left at the end of the queue. Perhaps it is not fully appreciated how popular walking remains in the older age cohort.⁴¹ Yet often older pedestrians in particular face an obstacle course (cracked pavements, cyclists riding on pavement, numerous obstructions, noisy and polluting nearby traffic, seemingly unsafe and often downright unpleasant, if not dangerous underpasses and 'skywalks' etc)⁴².
- iv. Yet, there are plenty of cost-effective ways to make walking a much more attractive experience and in doing so, improve public health.⁴³ We need clear pedestrian routes, with generous pavement width and separation from traffic. This would include large pedestrianisation schemes, of which there are many successful examples.⁴⁴ Of course, there will be those with mobility challenges that restrict their capacity to walk. Some members of the Elders Council, for example,

⁴⁰ <https://www.businessgreen.com/news/4170504/study-times-spent-roads-active-travel-england>

⁴¹ <https://ilcuk.org.uk/walking-more-popular-among-older-people-today-than-a-decade-ago/>

⁴² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5201320/>

⁴³ <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/sep/19/what-would-a-truly-walkable-city-look-like> ; <https://drawdown.org/solutions/walkable-cities> ; <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-12-05/urban-planner-jeff-speck-revisits-walkable-city-10-years-later>

⁴⁴ <https://rapidtransition.org/stories/reclaiming-the-streets-the-increasing-trend-of-pedestrianisation-around-the-world/> and <https://medium.com/@TechKnowDistribution/how-to-embrace-the-pedestrianisation-of-our-towns-and-cities-91b7679b80fc> .

Copenhagen is a good example: <https://globaldesigningcities.org/publication/global-street-design-guide/streets/pedestrian-priority-spaces/pedestrian-only-streets/pedestrian-streets-case-study-stroget-copenhagen/>

expressed concerns that the proposed pedestrianisation in the Greys Monument area would restrict their access to city centre facilities. But it should also be noted that there are ways round this problem.⁴⁵

- v. The option of **car-free or car-light developments** would appear not to be seriously considered. There are several good examples of their value.⁴⁶ They include a multigenerational building in Leeds that would also include care home for older people.⁴⁷ That is even true of the asphalt nation itself, the USA.⁴⁸ If other cities can do it, so can Newcastle. It could follow Edinburgh's plan, for example.⁴⁹
- vi. Safe walking is obviously of particular concern to older citizens.⁵⁰ Not just pedestrians but also cyclists benefit from **low traffic neighbourhoods**. Detailed academic studies show that such schemes yield massive benefits, some short-term local opposition notwithstanding.⁵¹ Clearly, there is a need for comprehensive planning, with additional programmes such as new seating and tree planting, instead of isolated schemes.
- vii. Safe walking requires safe pavements. However, these are frequently cracked and rendered dangerous, particularly for those with poorer eyesight, due to vehicles parking on them. Older people are particularly vulnerable. Newcastle ought to follow Edinburgh's lead.⁵²
- viii. For safety reasons and the particular risk to less agile people, we need much wider use (and enforcement) of **20 mph limits**.⁵³

⁴⁵ Eg <https://www.visitljubljana.com/en/visitors/travel-information/getting-around/kavalir-getting-around-the-city-centre-by-electric-car/>

⁴⁶ <https://www.building.co.uk/comment/the-drive-towards-car-free-communities/5118737.article>

⁴⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/aug/30/britains-first-car-free-school-planned-for-leeds>

⁴⁸ <https://passivehouseplus.ie/magazine/new-build/stirling-work-the-passive-social-housing-scheme-that-won-british-architecture-s-top-award#:~:text=Early%20in%20October%2C%20Norwich%20City,purest%2C%20most%20environmentally%20and%20socially> See also: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-68317559.amp>

⁴⁹ <https://www.livingstreetsedinburgh.org.uk/common-issues/policies-of-city-of-edinburgh-council-promoting-car-free-car-light-developments/>

⁵⁰ https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/79753/9789241505352_eng.pdf?sequence=1

⁵¹ https://www.transportxtra.com/publications/evolution/news/72417/ltns-don-t-displace-traffic-and-air-pollution-research-finds?fbclid=IwAR2IE2wkcv61fUaQ9IVW1L8P2hrnPp7C_EWOW1xg44VON2YNMFrcvuoKUG

LTNs have been in existence for over 50 years, though not named as such, with traffic circulation schemes introduced to protect residential areas. Often, old ones proved popular over time. Data from a series of studies evidences the following changes following the introduction of LTNs (1,3 & 4 below particularly relevant for an age-friendly city):

1. People more active: after 3 years, LTN residents did 115 minutes more walking per week & 20 minutes more cycling.
2. Car and van numbers down: the number registered in LTNs dropped 6% after two years
3. Safety greatly improved: road traffic accidents per trip were down 70% on roads within the LTNs, for pedestrians, cyclists, and car occupants alike.
4. Street Crime down 10% - larger decreases for violent crime. This effect increased over time, with an estimated 18% reduction after 3 years. No evidence of crime displacement to adjacent areas. This is of course very relevant to the council's stated and frequently repeated aim regarding 'safe' neighbourhoods
5. LTNs are being introduced in both deprived and well-off neighbourhoods.
6. No evidence of increased fire response times in LTNs nor on boundary roads, although there is some evidence of increased perception of delays.

⁵² <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/newparkingrules>

⁵³ The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents say that:

- ix. Public transport is of course particularly significant for older citizens.⁵⁴ It should be stressed that, often, reliability is more important than speed and even frequency. Newcastle City Council has arguably been too biased towards the mantra of 'keeping the traffic moving' whereas most public transport users are far more concerned that the bus, metro or train simply turns up.
- x. Many **local bus services** are being shredded, sometimes condemning older citizens to isolation.⁵⁵ Though some buses have become more pleasant to use (eg 'Voltra' buses on Q3 service), others still do not provide a comfortable, smooth ride. Many much used bus stops lack shelters, something that again hits older people disproportionately. The Elders Council welcomes the forthcoming improvements to the Metro system but, of course, the lines only serve certain parts of the city.
- xi. Older people in particular would benefit from better bus shelter provision. It is possible to see instances (e.g. Gosforth High Street) where there is an abandoned bus stop with a shelter 50 yards from a very heavily used bus stop with no shelter. There is much scope for environmentally friendly uses of bus shelters across the city.⁵⁶
- xii. Be it buses or metro trains, it has become much harder to obtain information, get tickets and renew passes (again there is the all too familiar discriminatory assumption that everyone has access to computers and/or smart phones. The closure of travel centres has not helped. They were heavily used by older citizens and the reintroduction of a central one ought to be part of the transport plan. It scarcely needs to be added that all citizens would benefit from a **fully integrated public transport system**, with synchronised timetables, through tickets and so forth.⁵⁷
- xiii. Reduced fares can have a big impact in promoting active travel instead of car driving.⁵⁸ But such measures are far from enough. Car driving has to be made less convenient and less cheap.⁵⁹

"Hit by a car at 40 mph, nine out of ten pedestrians will be killed; hit by a car at 30 mph, about half of pedestrians will be killed; hit by a car at 20 mph, nine out of ten pedestrians will survive.

⁵⁴ https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb_june15_the_future_of_transport_in_an_ageing_society.pdf

⁵⁵ <https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/how-britains-bus-services-have-dramatically-declined>

⁵⁶ <https://cleantechnica.com/2016/08/08/cool-solar-powered-bus-shelter-wins/> ; https://inhabitat.com/uks-first-solar-powered-glazed-bus-shelter-generates-enough-electricity-to-power-a-london-home/?fbclid=IwAR3cpkklSU66nc-kCw5UlvQvQT2zo_7JwtZEeKtX9I8ZF86ERp_XGTNkiA <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/bus-stop-plants-green-roof-bees-holland-utrecht-a8997581.html>

⁵⁷ https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/How-to-make-public-transport-an-attractive-option-in-your-city?language=en_US

⁵⁸ Eg <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2213624X24000130>

⁵⁹ <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230323-even-free-transport-can-t-shake-luxembourg-s-love-of-the-car> . For general alternatives, see: <https://integratedtransport.org.uk/project/john-whitelegg> ; <http://www.stevemelia.co.uk/urbantransport.html> ; <https://pedestrianspace.org/book-car-sick/> ; <https://rdf.org.uk/2023/08/07/book-review-carmageddon-how-cars-make-life-worse-and-what-to-do-about-it-by-daniel-knowles/>

- xiv. Many older people still cycle and indeed more could do in the right circumstances.⁶⁰ It can bring big gains in terms of not just physical but also cognitive functions⁶¹ as well as reduced air pollution and CO2 emissions. Safety — and perceptions of safety — is critical.⁶² Though cyclists and pedestrians do mix reasonably well in some continental cities such as Amsterdam, there seems to be more conflict in this country, with some older pedestrians feeling threatened by speeding cyclists, especially ones who use pavements rather than the road (hence talk of 'lycra louts' etc).
- xv. In a number of areas in Newcastle, there seems to have been a commitment to the policy of 'shared use' (e.g. Town Moor and along Great North Road). Perhaps a different approach is needed.⁶³ Certainly, pro-active enforcement of existing regulations is necessary, not least regarding the proliferation of 'fast food' deliverers on bikes. On roads such as John Dobson street, it is a common sight to see such cyclists using the pavement even though there actually is a generous cycle lane.
- xvi. Many older citizens feel threatened by the current 'orange' **electric scooter scheme**. In practice these machines reduce active travel⁶⁴ and in any case are too small in number to make even the slightest dent on the number of vehicles on the roads. The risks they pose to pedestrians have led to bans in some cities, notably Paris.⁶⁵ It is important to consider how such vehicles are used in everyday 'practice' (eg more than one rider, routine failure to wear protective head gear, riding on pavements, abandonment so pavements are blocked), not what 'in theory' ought to be the case.
- xvii. It might be noted here that, though **electric vehicles** do indeed reduce some problems, electrification of the current enormous vehicle fleet is not a sustainable option. It leaves other problems as bad as ever (eg pollution from tyres and brakes) and unsustainably aggravates others eg large-scale mining to produce raw materials for batteries.⁶⁶ Large-scale adoption of driverless cars is, it has to be said, an absurd fantasy and probably will make negligible headway due to likely insurance problems, apart other negative impacts.
- xviii. The goal of electric taxi fleets might deserve inclusion in the Plan.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ <https://www.cycleboom.org/cycling-in-later-life-uk/> ; <https://www.reading.ac.uk/news-archive/press-releases/pr533115.html>

⁶¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6388745/>

⁶² <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1013072/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

⁶³ <https://aseasyasridingabike.wordpress.com/2015/11/19/against-shared-use/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/policy-positions/all/all/our-position-on-e-scooters>

⁶⁵ <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/paris-e-scooter-ban-intl-scli/index.html>

⁶⁶ https://ecostandard.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/230203_DUH_EEB_ECOS_Information-Paper_Env.-Impact-Electric-Cars.pdf ; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48875361#:~:text=It%20warns%20that%20electrifying%20cars,living%20without%20needing%20a%20car.> ;

<https://kevinanderson.info/blog/the-solution-is-the-problem/>

⁶⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/16/dundee-green-revolution-charging-hubs-electric-cabs-scotland>
<https://www.businessgreen.com/news/3062126/green-cabs-coventry-launches-go-electric-taxi-scheme>

- xix. It is a pity that more radical options such as **new trams** (as in Nottingham, for example, are not being examined seriously, given their very real advantages.⁶⁸ Pollution matters apart, trams are far easier to board for those with less mobility and are more reliable, not least because their tram lines permit them to keep going through congestion. Newcastle did of course, used to have a good tram network and a long-term commitment to its revival ought to be seriously considered.⁶⁹
- xx. There would seem to be a need for more radical approaches to traffic in the city centre. Several years ago, the Elders Council proposed a one-way system going round (John Dobson Street, Percy Street etc). Whatever the merits of that particular proposal, the time has surely come for a bold, comprehensive scheme, instead of disjointed piecemeal changes.
- xxi. Sustainable transport would bring with gains on many fronts. That include benefits for the health services as well as individuals. Apparently, just shifting a mere 1.7 % of car journeys to active travel such as walking and cycling, for example, could save the NHS £2.5 billion a year by reducing health problems like cardiovascular disease and diabetes. That is nearly 2% of the NHS's entire budget. Many older people depend on the NHS: we have a vested interest in its wellbeing!
- xxii. There are many cities now pioneering better ways of getting about.⁷⁰

6. Leisure, culture and tourism facilities

- i. Obviously as people age and perhaps become less mobile, their participation in various cultural and leisure activities may decline. Yet the number of people 65 and over at events such as the lunchtime music concerts at the King's Hall Newcastle University, illustrates how keen many remain to enjoy such activities. The Lit & Phil also puts on many lectures and concerts that are well attended by over-65s.
- ii. Critical considerations include cost, proximity and availability of venues. The King's Hall concerts are of course free and near good bus routes.
- iii. We would stress the importance of comparatively informal, 'low technology' activities: walkers' groups, yoga classes, water aerobics, visits to museums, halls and gardens, allotments, "men's sheds"⁷¹ book

⁶⁸ <https://medium.com/@blaisekelly/why-trams-are-cheaper-than-buses-6d929192624a>

⁶⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/aug/24/in-praise-of-the-tram-britains-lost-network-and-the-future-of-transport>

⁷⁰ Eg <https://www.metro-magazine.com/10009082/why-zurich-is-a-model-for-public-transportation> ; <https://civitas.eu/sites/default/files/CARAVEL%20D5%20-%20Opt%206%20krakow.pdf> ; <https://www.ecotippingpoints.org/our-stories/indepth/germany-freiburg-sustainability-transportation-energy-green-economy.html> ; <https://www.visitingvienna.com/transport/public/> ; <https://www.france24.com/en/20190831-france-dunkirk-free-transportation-bus-success-climate-cities> ; <https://www.fastcompany.com/3039819/in-2050-you-might-want-to-be-living-in-helsinki> ; https://urban-mobility-observatory.transport.ec.europa.eu/resources/case-studies/pedestrianisation-ljubljana-city-centre_en ; <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-05-01/a-new-battle-over-car-free-boulevards-in-brussels>

⁷¹ <https://menssheds.org.uk/find-a-shed/>

groups, local history societies, bridge clubs, coffee mornings, arts and crafts etc. We would hope that provision for such activities receives as much attention as, say, expensive gyms and higher-level sport.

- iv. Older people clearly benefit in many ways from adult education courses, keep fit sessions, and other group pursuit. Yet there is a dearth of venues to hire for such activities at affordable prices. Certainly, prices charged by local libraries can be prohibitive. A policy review here might be helpful.
- v. A council land use plan cannot of course determine the priorities of commercial enterprises in the leisure sector. But it has to be noted that the opportunities provided by them tend to be heavily focused on the 'youth market' e.g. very noisy, 'vertical drinking' bars.
- vi. In practice, there is de facto discrimination against older age groups. For example, many older people experience hearing difficulties in venues where there is loud music and other noise.
- vii. They are also discouraged from going into the city centre in the evening when public transport can become unreliable and very infrequent. Even earlier finishing times at venues such as the Glasshouse and City Hall might encourage more older citizens to attend since there would be less rush to catch a late bus, one that might not even turn up.
- viii. Several of the activities/venues flagged up in the Plan are very car-dependent. This would seem to contradict other Ambitions.
- ix. The Elders Council publishes annually 'EC Rider'.⁷² Though it does highlight recreational opportunities via public transport, in passing it also spotlights the difficulty in reaching many places by bus or rail. It underlines again the importance of improvements to public transport.

⁷² https://www.elderscouncil.org.uk/files/ugd/3d3247_ce6804ba9b2a4687890fb9db8643cfad.pdf

7. Homes and communities

- i. Land should be allocated property designed with older citizens in mind, accessible, adaptable and easy to heat and maintain, ideally on recovered brownfield sites within the existing build-up area. Elders Council is a partner in the Future Homes Alliance which is seeking to develop models of flexible housing which can adapt to changes across the life course. Elders Council has also worked with Northumbria University on new models of housing including intergenerational homes and live/work spaces.
- ii. Proximity to existing neighbours, friends and relatives can be especially important for older citizens. Housing on 'edge-of-town' developments, no matter how well designed, is unable to satisfy such social criteria.
- iii. Most of our housing stock has already been built, meaning we need to focus on how we can make existing homes more accessible and comfortable to live in through adaptation schemes which include insulation and and new energy schemes such as heat pumps
- iv. 'Executive' housing with 3-4 bedrooms and garages for 2 cars on low density cul-de-sac estates offers little, neither socially nor economically, for those wishing/needing to downsize. It must be stressed how downsizing can free up larger properties for, say, those with young families.
- v. There is a strong case for more support to be given to collaborative forms of housing such as co-housing schemes for older people.⁷³
- vi. high quality sheltered housing, with the flexibility to adjust to increasing care needs is similarly important.⁷⁴ It is possible to combine energy-saving (e.g. Passivhaus standards) with attractive, walkable neighbourhoods, with house prices not beyond most people's means.⁷⁵ If other cities can do it, so can Newcastle.
- vii. Again we need to learn from successful housing models abroad. Vienna seems to be one.⁷⁶ But there are some good initiatives in the UK that could be copied. Of course, the Elders Council would argue that provision for older citizens should be part and parcel of any such developments.⁷⁷

⁷³ There are a number of possibilities suggested here: http://www.ilc-alliance.org/images/uploads/publication-pdfs/pdf_pdf_49.pdf See also: <http://www.owch.org.uk>, [CollaborAGE - Housing LIN](http://www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk/communities/existing/the-midlands), <http://www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk/communities/existing/the-midlands> and <http://www.therightplace.net/coco/public/>

⁷⁴ Once again we need more radical thinking eg <https://www.radicalresthomes.com>

⁷⁵ Eg <https://passivehouseplus.ie/magazine/new-build/stirling-work-the-passive-social-housing-scheme-that-won-british-architecture-s-top-award#:~:text=Early%20in%20October%2C%20Norwich%20City,purest%2C%20most%20environmentally%20and%20socially>

⁷⁶ <https://www.ft.com/content/05719602-89c6-4bbc-9bbe-5842fd0c3693> ; <https://www.emta.com/news/20-years-of-successful-transport-and-fare-integration-in-the-region-of-vienna/>

⁷⁷ <https://www.bioregional.com/projects-and-services/case-studies/one-brighton-showing-that-sustainable-homes-can-be-a-commercial-success> ; <https://www.bioregional.com/projects-and-services/case-studies/bedzed-the-uks-first-large-scale-eco-village> ; <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/dec/23/net-zero-carbon-neighbourhood-to-be-built->

- viii. But there is an urgent need to avoid planning that leads to a 'doughnut' city', with quite affluent groups living on the urban edges and closer to the urban core, rings of real poverty. The current Core Strategy seems to have led in the wrong direction with far too little emphasis on sustainable redevelopment of 'run-down' and derelict sites. Sometimes those new estates on the urban fringe (notably the Great Park) were built without necessary accompanying facilities, e.g. primary schools and shops, being created at the same time.
- ix. The doughnut city can be vertical as well as horizontal.⁷⁸ It often assumes the form of 'pencil towers' and 'iceberg' homes.⁷⁹ Such developments reflect and sustain inequality. Older people are particularly excluded by what is often very exclusive, hyper-expensive accommodation whose residents often contribute little by way of local shopping. The Hadrian Tower and the developments around the Baltic would appear to fall into this malign form of development.

in-south-wales ; <https://www.greenbuildingstore.co.uk/technical-resource/denby-dale-passivhaus-uk-first-cavity-wall-passive-house/> They are now beginning to include a new generation of timber buildings eg <https://waughthistleton.com/murray-grove/>

⁷⁸ <https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/products/52-vertical>

⁷⁹ <https://papress.com/products/icebergs-zombies-and-the-ultra-thin>

8. Attractive and safe places

- i. The Elders Council would certainly endorse such an obviously appealing goal.
- ii. It has to be noted that there is a widespread view that most development, including new housing estates are “mediocre” or “poor”.⁸⁰. Many are, in practice, also car-dependent.⁸¹ The latter is not just environmentally unsustainable but does not make for “attractive and safe” places.⁸² It is not clear how the Plan would serve to make big inroads into such problems.
- iii. Safety is not just a matter of objective reality (eg data about road accidents or crime figures). It is also a matter of perceptions. Many older people can feel unsafe even if the ‘facts’ show that their fears are not merited. The problem is made worse by the routine absence of police on street patrol as well as staff at bus, Metro and rail stations etc.
- iv. The growth in the number of heavy SUVs, ‘autobesity’, has decreased the safety of pedestrians, cyclists and users of small vehicles.⁸³ Older people are particularly at risk.⁸⁴ Such mega-vehicles bring many other problems.⁸⁵ They even ‘eat up’ parking spaces.⁸⁶ Newcastle might emulate cities such as Paris that are seeking to discourage such dangerous vehicles.⁸⁷
- v. Academic studies of low traffic neighbourhoods show a fall in crime. Street Crime fell by 10% on average, with larger decreases for violent crime. This effect increased over time, with an estimated 18% reduction after 3 years. They found no evidence of crime displacement to adjacent areas. [OBJ]
- vi. “Attractiveness” might be in the eye of the beholder. But there may be more objective evidence from what are widely perceived to be desirable residential areas and places large numbers of people like to visit. Even the design of hospices may shed light on what makes people feel comparatively well. It might be concluded that design codes should stress qualities such as human scale, verdant, soft-edged, and (for the most part) tranquil, with plenty of places for human interaction. Buildings are certainly not just machines to live in. The Design Age

⁸⁰ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2020/jan/new-housing-design-england-overwhelmingly-mediocre-or-poor>

⁸¹ https://www.transportfornewhomes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Building-Car-Dependency-2022.pdf?utm_source=TfNH_website&utm_medium=website_pdf&utm_campaign=report_launch

⁸² <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/730724/carmageddon-by-daniel-knowles/>

⁸³ https://www.bookbrowse.com/excerpts/index.cfm/book_number/1105/page_number/3/high-and-mighty?fbclid=IwAR3alesiPibd4qj_BYly059Ru14S-MpYCHLVzV08X2X3Nzg6CNz67Yf80_I ;

<https://road.cc/content/news/new-research-shows-danger-cyclists-posed-large-cars-303555> ;

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0022437522000810?via=ihub>

⁸⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1246062/>

⁸⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/oct/07/a-deadly-problem-should-we-ban-suvs-from-our-cities>

⁸⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/aug/26/more-than-150-car-models-too-big-for-regular-uk-parking-spaces>

⁸⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-67133135> ;

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jul/27/france-crack-down-suv-drivers-britain-city-streets>

Institute is celebrating innovation in design and is a good source of ideas, About us - Design Age Institute.

- vii. The same considerations apply to density. Indeed, some designers talk of the 'goldilocks principle: not too big, not too small. [OBJ]
- viii. There is a powerful literature on what makes 'good places'. It has sometimes been called a 'pattern language'⁸⁸. Others talk of 'memorable places'.⁸⁹ Design codes should stress "building green".⁹⁰ Compactness of form would seem a key element of sustainable design.⁹¹
- ix. The Plan talks of "character". Again, there is a strong element of subjectivity here. As is normally the case with cities, there is also a good deal of eclecticism of its architecture. But there is much of which locals can be proud, as the relevant Pevsner Guide rightly points out. Indeed many people regard Grey Street as a particularly "elegant".
- x. Sometimes, it seems proper lessons have not been learned from past mistakes.⁹² The future of the Malmo Quay is indeed a critical test of council commitment to Newcastle's heritage.
- xi. Indeed there could be opportunities for reversing the council's current 'Tall Buildings' policy to protect its townscape.⁹³
- xii. Though any land use plan is to some extent hostage to retail trends, it has to be recognised that Newcastle's distinctive character has also been badly compromised by the 'Clone Town' phenomenon.⁹⁴
- xiii. Where there is scope for large-scale redevelopment such as the Forth yards, Health Innovation Neighbourhood (formerly Campus for Ageing and Vitality), Newcastle Quay West priority ought to be given new 'eco-communities', again with due allocation of properties for older people.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ <https://www.patternlanguage.com>

⁸⁹ <https://communitychange.ipg.vt.edu/articles/10.21061/cc.v5i1.a.49>

⁹⁰ <https://brightonandhovebuildinggreen.files.wordpress.com/2017/07/johnstone-and-newton-building-green.pdf>

⁹¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S266616592030017X>

⁹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/29/skyscrapers-wrecks-cities-luxury-towers-ugly-greed> ; <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/death-to-the-skyscraper>

⁹⁴ https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/1733ceec8041a9de5e_ubm6b6t6i.pdf

⁹⁵ Eg <https://ensia.com/articles/paris-is-building-the-eco-community-of-the-future-right-now-heres-how/> ; <https://www.dezeen.com/2020/01/13/faelledby-henning-larsen-copenhagen-timber-neighbourhood-architecture/> ; http://klimakvarter.dk/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Copenhagens-first-climate-resilient-neighbourhood_WEB_low.pdf

9. Protect and improve Newcastle's natural environment

- i. Many older people are lovers of nature, with a fair few bird watchers and the like in their ranks. They are also found in ramblers' group and other organisations that actively enjoy open spaces and fresh air. But, through their lifetimes, they have witnessed a major and, for the most part, on-going decline in the richness and diversity of flora and fauna, 'biodiversity breakdown'.⁹⁶
- ii. There are many causes but one is urban sprawl. It is not clear what the Newcastle Plan will do to halt this. Nor is it evident if there is any strategy to reduce another cause of the decline of urban biodiversity, namely the concreting over of gardens, land that could provide major havens for wildlife.⁹⁷ Such loss of porous surfaces can exacerbate flooding risks.⁹⁸ It seems set to get worse.⁹⁹ Further blows to biodiversity are delivered via monocultural planting, including manicured lawns often regularly sprayed with biocides. Golf courses are but one example.¹⁰⁰
- iii. Many older Newcastle citizens cherish the Town Moor. Yet it might be argued that its wildlife potential is not being realised. Arguably it too is a biologically impoverished monoculture. There is perhaps a conflict here between those who prizes 'open views' along with who like land uses such as visiting circuses and fairs, on the other hand, and a more ecologically based perception. But, perhaps, there is scope for a fair amount of tree planting.
- iv. Like others, older citizens also value 'green corridors' such as the Ouseburn. The Ouseburn Plan¹⁰¹ would seem to have much to commend it. Perhaps more could be made of the area around its source, west of Woosington and A696.
- v. It has to be stressed that not much land is necessarily involved. Many Newcastle travellers to London may not have noticed next to King's Cross railway station the small ecological treasure that is the Camley Street Nature Reserve.¹⁰² It is surely something to be emulated across Newcastle
- vi. There are some possible conflicts not least regarding the city's parks. There is a choice to be made whether their primary role is

⁹⁶ <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/landmark-report-shows-uk-wildlifes-devastating-decline>

⁹⁷ <https://www.planningresource.co.uk/article/1347519/charity-warns-loss-front-gardens>

⁹⁸

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290173810_Impact_of_paved_front_gardens_on_current_and_future_urban_flooding

⁹⁹ <https://transportandenergy.com/2023/08/23/research-shows-half-of-uk-front-gardens-could-be-paved-over-to-accommodate-an-ev/>

¹⁰⁰ <https://medium.com/@nataliealeinbach/green-spaces-that-arent-really-green-ce85e3b23d19>

¹⁰¹

<https://www.theouseburnway.co.uk/#:~:text=The%20Ouse%20Burn%20Way%20will,water%20quality%2C%20wellbeing%20and%20wildlife.>

¹⁰² <https://www.wildlondon.org.uk/nature-reserves/camley-street-natural-park>

the traditional one of 'green lungs'/'oases of tranquillity' or merely site that can be used for many purposes, including ones (eg noisy festivals) that are incompatible with that former option. Many parks are in any case 'nature-depleted' though this deficiency is also a great opportunity (as illustrated by a number of wildlife spaces in city parks such as Gosforth Central).¹⁰³ Newcastle is not alone in what, too often is a story of neglect and misuse.¹⁰⁴

- vii. The health benefits of greener spaces for senior citizens are well known but due attention has to be paid to factors such as proximity and attractiveness (both aesthetic and practical eg public toilets).¹⁰⁵ Actual and perceived safety is an additional matter.
- viii. Councils ought to examine ways in which they could help the increasing number of community groups that are working to 'green' back lanes and other such spaces. Older people have the time and often the skills to play a major part, an activity that really boosts their own health and social interaction whilst improving the whole neighbourhoods for everyone. The "Greening Wingrove" initiative and Scotswood Garden have shown the way forward locally and there are many inspiring examples around the country.¹⁰⁶
- ix. There are examples of housing developments designed with nature in mind that should be emulated.¹⁰⁷
- x. Tree planting can help reduce flood risks, amongst many other benefits.¹⁰⁸ So too can restoration of 'natural' river banks and channels.¹⁰⁹ Green roofs can play their part too.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ Actually the renovation of Exhibition Park illustrates the contribution that senior citizens have made to the city's amenities: <https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/newcastles-exhibition-park-re-opens-after-9627451>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/aug/29/underfunded-rusting-fenced-off-britains-parks-public-spaces-government#:~:text=Big%20city%20parks%20-%20especially%20those,large%20portions%20of%20the%20summer.>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6888485/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-merseyside-53320815> ; <http://www.urbanmovement.co.uk/thoughts/more-alley-gardens-please>

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.kingsbrook-aylesbury.co.uk>

¹⁰⁸ https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/apr/13/500000-tree-planting-project-helped-yorkshire-town-miss-winter-floods?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.klimatanpassning.se/en/cases/restoration-of-rivers-in-norrland-increases-resilience-1.141988> ; <https://www.klimatanpassning.se/en/cases/open-surface-runoff-management-in-the-augustenberg-neighbourhood-in-malmo-1.117387> ; <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/rotterdam-flood-proof-climate-change>

¹¹⁰ <https://oppla.eu/casestudy/18381>

- xi. Nothing is mentioned in the Plan about light pollution. Many older people have witnessed the accelerating loss of the 'night sky' due to this cause. Such pollution badly affects both wildlife and human health. The energy costs are also drain on council finances.¹¹¹ We note that other towns and cities are pursuing 'dark sky' initiatives which Newcastle could emulate.¹¹²
- xii. Generally we have to add under the umbrella of Sustainable Newcastle and alongside the notion of an 'age-friendly city' that of a biophilic city. There are many inspiring examples under that strand of how Newcastle's 'natural environment could be greatly improved.'¹¹³

Final Comment

We hereby conclude by stressing again the important of including a strategy to become an age-friendly city under the general Newcastle Plan.

¹¹¹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/councils-warn-spiralling-cost-street-lighting-and-pothole-repairs-due-increasing-energy> Indeed it is stimulating commensurate action eg <https://ashden.org/news/northumberland-council-cuts-carbon-with-led-street-lights/> ; <https://www.itv.com/news/border/update/2016-02-24/moffat-named-europes-first-dark-sky-town/> ; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/oct/26/toulouse-heat-sensitive-lampposts> ; <https://www.signify.com/en-gb/our-company/news/press-releases/2018/20180605-going-bats-dutch-town-is-first-in-world-to-install-bat-friendly-led-street-lights> ; <https://www.dw.com/en/energy-crisis-german-cities-turn-out-the-lights/a-63068829>

¹¹² <https://www.conserve-energy-future.com/impressive-ways-reduce-light-pollution.php>

¹¹³ <https://www.biophiliccities.org>