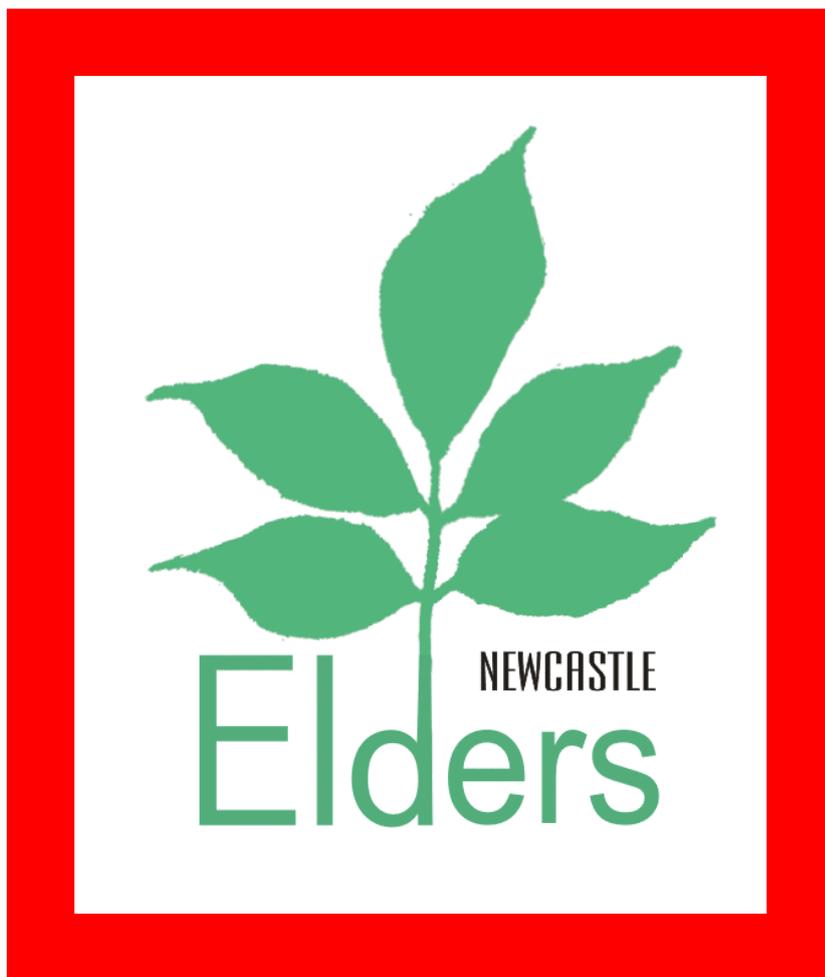


Elders Council of Newcastle

**OLDER PERSON FRIENDLY CITY
DISTRICT CENTRES**



Report from a Working Group
September 2013

What is the Elders Council of Newcastle

The Elders Council of Newcastle was established in 2001 to provide an effective voice for older people who are resident or active in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne. Membership is open to anyone over the age of 50 and is free to Newcastle residents. The Elders Council is a registered charity.

Through its work the Elders Council tries to make sure that the views and the ideas of older people are made known to policy makers and service providers, so that the provisions made for older people meet their real needs. In addition the Elders Council attaches much importance to making sure that the contribution older people make to the community is recognised and that older people are valued accordingly.

In pursuit of these aims, the Elders Council played a major part in the production of Newcastle City Council's strategy for an ageing population, named Everyone's Tomorrow, which was launched in 2007. More recently, with much encouragement from the Elders Council, the City Council signed up to the Dublin Declaration of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities in November 2011. This has led to the formation of an Age Friendly City Group, of which the Elders Council is an active member.

In summary the Elders Council aims to:

1. Promote the benefit and social inclusion of elders by providing a voice on issues concerning their quality of life and wellbeing and
2. Realise the potential of elders as a creative and active resource to the community.

For further information on the Elders Council please see:
www.elderscouncil.org.uk or www.informationnow.org.uk .

OLDER PERSON FRIENDLY CITY

DISTRICT CENTRES

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FOREWORD

I am an older person who has lived near Gosforth High Street for over 40 years and I can't overestimate its importance to me. I shop there and bank there; I go to the doctors just off the High Street and the library just off the other end. I buy books at the charity shop and drink coffee in one of a whole range of possible outlets. On a Tuesday night I meet chums for a couple of pints in one of the pubs. I'm a bit worried about my weight so I don't use the extraordinary range of takeaway food outlets available and neither, I'm afraid, do I take full (or any) advantage of the zumba classes – but I could.

This list could go on and on but nothing in it would be as important to me as the sense of place, the sense of community. Time and time again I come back from the shops and say to my wife, "Do you know who I've just met on the High Street?"

The High Street is one of my key contact points with the world; without it I would be sadder and less fulfilled. I would walk less and my fitness would suffer and this report reveals that I am not alone. The importance of District Centres to older people is made absolutely clear and in a world where older people are going to form an ever increasing proportion of the population it is vital for the Centres to be encouraged, maintained and improved. Older people need accessible services, they desperately need to feel part of a community but it is clear that they also care deeply about the appearance of the environment round about them.

John Grundy, Patron of the Elders Council of Newcastle

INTRODUCTION

This report is the fourth in a series of investigations by an Elders Council Working Group, aiming to assess the ‘older person friendliness’ of environments which are important to older people in their daily lives. We are told that we are living longer, but if we are to enjoy the bonus of extra years of life, we want them to be years of independent healthy living in an Age Friendly City. So in responding to the Newcastle Gateshead One Core Strategy and Urban Core Area Action Plan of 2011, the Elders Council expressed the view that the City should not only aim to be economically prosperous, but should be **A GOOD PLACE IN WHICH TO GROW OLD**, as well as a good place to live, to study and to work.

In the City’s plans for the future, retail activity in the City Centre and in District Centres is identified as a key driver of economic growth. Over recent months there has also been public debate about the future of local high streets. The growth in internet shopping is identified as responsible for reduced activity in retail centres, but the shopping guru, Mary Portas, has stimulated discussion – and, in some cases, action – to introduce a greater variety of activities in high streets.

For older people, while shopping for the basic necessities of daily living is an important activity, for many it also has a social purpose – to meet and to talk with friends and neighbours and to feel part of a community. In February 2013, a retail market research company published a report¹ that ‘silver shoppers’ may in the future be the economic saviours of traditional shopping centres! All the more reason, therefore, for offering the results of the Working Group’s investigations as a response to the issues raised in the Urban Core Area Action Plan section on Sustainable Thriving Neighbourhoods, and in particular to Policy 12, for Local Services, and Policy 13 for Quality of Place.

DISTRICT CENTRES – what and where are they?

Newcastle City Council’s Action Plan refers to 8 District Centres in neighbourhoods around the City. They are seen as having a high level of retail activity and as providing a place for a range of community services, in contrast to the 35 Local Centres which offer a lesser range of shops and services. The District Centres vary in character and in their origins. Gosforth High Street, for instance, was the centre of a

¹ Reference: The Guardian 8.2.13

village on the Great North Road. Shields Road and West Road developed around main traffic and trading routes east and west into the City (both on the route of the Roman Wall!). Adelaide Terrace in Benwell and Chillingham Road in Heaton have grown up in the centre of 19th and 20th century housing development and in outer suburban centres in the case of Kingston Park and West Denton Park. These 7 Centres are the main focus of this study, as the 8th Centre at Great North Park is still in development.



Figure 1: Westgate Road



Figure 2: Shields Road, Hadrian Square
(note preserved section of Hadrian's Wall
indicated by arrow)

METHOD OF ASSESSMENT

As with previous enquiries undertaken by this Working Group, the starting point was to find out from members of the Elders Council what is most important to them as older people when they visit District Centres. So the first stage was to circulate a questionnaire with the September 2011 edition of the Elders Council Newsletter, asking about use of District Centres, and which features are most valued and are most desired, if not actually present. An analysis of the 62 completed questionnaires gave the following results.

Use of District Centres

Almost three quarters of respondents reported frequent visits, while just over a quarter reported that they rarely or never visit a District Centre, preferring their local centre.

Valued and Desired Features

Taking together the number of mentions of valued existing features, and also those most desired, gives the order of importance as:

- Access by public transport, especially bus services
- G.P. surgery
- Post Office
- Supermarket
- Library
- Variety of shops
- Community Centre/ community activities



Figure 3: West Denton

The next stage was to draw up a checklist of features to be recorded, based on the above list, but also including amenities found to be important in previous surveys, i.e. state of pavements and cleanliness; pedestrian crossings; public toilets; seats; and general appearance of buildings and streets, including the amount of greenery. Systematic surveys of the 7 Centres were then carried out over several months in 2012.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The main findings from the Working Group's surveys are set out in accompanying tables (see pg. 12 and pg. 13). Some of the findings were reported in 3 issues of the Elders Council Newsletter during 2013, and comments from readers were invited and discussed. This summary gives an opportunity to consider the full extent of the retail activity, community services and amenities recorded, and which can now be measured against the features most valued by a sample of older people.

Transport / Bus Services

The table on pg. 12 shows that all 7 centres are served by two or more bus routes connecting to the City Centre, and to other parts. Gosforth High Street and Shields Road are particularly well connected. In most cases the number of bus stops enables convenient access directly to shops from the street. The number of pedestrian crossing points is important to ensure safe movement across a busy street. It was also noted that there are car parks and parking spaces close to District Centres, especially for disabled drivers. The exceptions are Kingston Park and West Denton Park which have large car parks, but consequently the distance from public transport to shop doors is greater, although Tesco at Kingston Park have 3 special buses coming directly to the shop entrance.



Figure 4: Kingston Park

GP Surgery / Health Facilities

The table shows that there is at least one GP surgery based in, or very close to each Centre. In some instances, they are within a Health Centre offering a range of other health services, e.g. as at West Denton Park and Adelaide Terrace. Shields Road also has an Urgent Care Centre, and there is a Walk-In Centre on the West Road. It is also of interest that NHS practitioners, such as pharmacists and optometrists, have premises within all the Centres, but dentists and chiropodists are fewer in number.

Post Office / Financial and Professional Services

The Financial Services table shows there is a post office within each Centre except for Kingston Park where the post office is a short distance away. Most post offices now are located in shared premises, and are still important for those older people who prefer to use a post office account for pensions and benefit payments. It can also be noted that branches of banks and building societies are not evenly spread across the city – and this is also true for money shops and pawnbrokers. It was noted that in addition to these facilities, there are cashpoints in all centres, accessed from the street or within shops. There is an uneven spread of professional services, with a cluster of estate agents, travel agents, solicitors and accountants on Gosforth High Street.

Supermarket / Variety of Shops

The table of retail activity sets out the findings under a number of headings.

Shopping for Food

In this table it can be seen that each Centre, with the exception of the West Road, has at least one supermarket, varying in size from the 'superstores' of the major chains to the medium sized and smaller stores. For those who have a preference for smaller specialist shops, it is helpful that a number of greengrocers, bakers and butchers still survive, together with a range of convenience stores, particularly in Shields Road, West Road and Adelaide Terrace.

Household Goods and Services appear as a separate category in the Table. It can be seen that Shields Road and Gosforth High Street are well supplied with hardware and ironmongers, although Adelaide Terrace and Chillingham Road

are not far behind. Shields Road and Adelaide Terrace are both good sources of second hand furniture and household goods.

Other Shops and Services

In other categories the largest number of shops were 45 recorded for Gosforth High Street, and 41 for Shields Road, with approximately half that number for West Road, Adelaide Terrace and Chillingham Road. Kingston Park and West Denton Park have fewer smaller shops but have the largest supermarkets with a comprehensive range of goods in one store. It is of interest that the most numerous traders are hairdressers and barbers who have several shops in each Centre, followed by newsagents, cards and stationery shops. For general interest, the number of betting shops and charity shops are noted separately in the Table, but separate figures are not given, although they were recorded, for 14 other categories.

Total Retail Activity

The grand totals for retail activity in all categories shows the highest numbers of shops in Shields Road at 77, and Gosforth High Street at 64, which also have the widest variety. Particular attention is drawn to the number of empty shops recorded, where Shields Road has the highest number at 23 followed by Adelaide Terrace at 16. In both these locations it was noted that the empty shops seemed to be in poor condition, whereas in some other areas they seemed well maintained and available for re-letting.



Figure 5: Shields Road – empty shops

Library / Community Facilities

A library has been highlighted by older people, as an important amenity in a neighbourhood, not only for borrowing books, but also as an information hub, offering facilities to access the internet.



Figure 6: West Denton

Four of the District Centres have a library, in all cases combined with other facilities, either a customer care centre, or recreation centre. West Denton Park, Shields Road, and Gosforth (not actually on the High Street, but within a short distance) have modern swimming baths and recreation centres either in one building or close together and linked with a library. Some Council offices are located in District Centres, offering an access point to Council services. For a range of other community activities Church premises are important and all District Centres except West Denton had at least one church. Most Churches now have space for secular use, as well as worship. They are an important resource for voluntary projects located in their neighbourhoods, especially those without a Community Centre.

Social Activities

The table of community facilities shows the number of Bingo and amusement arcades, mainly on Shields Road, and Social Clubs in 4 centres. The table of Catering facilities shows the numbers of cafes, restaurants, coffee shops, snack bars, etc. as well as takeaways and public houses. The distinction between categories is rather blurred as some snack bars and cafes also offer takeaway food and some takeaways have a few seats for customers to consume food. Most public houses also offer meals and snacks. Comments from members suggest that Gosforth High Street, followed by Shields Road, offer the best options for a comfortable place to meet friends for a coffee or a meal. As the numbers of public houses and off-licences have declined, the number of takeaways has increased, and supermarkets and other shops are licensed to sell alcoholic drinks.

Amenities Valued by Older People

Data was collected about these amenities but has not been tabulated. The main points are:

Pavements were mainly found to be level and well maintained but some patches of broken paving and uneven surfaces were recorded (Gosforth High Street and Adelaide Terrace).

Streets on the whole were clean and litter-free, with an impressive number of waste bins and recycling bins in all Centres.

Seats were noted in each Centre, actually on the street or under cover (as in Gosforth Shopping Centre) and sometimes arranged in social groups, and close to community notice boards. Attempts to create social spaces seemed to be undermined by damage to seats and out of date information notice boards.



Figure 7.i: Adelaide Terrace



Figure 7.ii: Gosforth Shopping Centre



Figure 7.iii: Gosforth High Street

Toilets – There are automated toilets on Chillingham Road and Shields Road, and public toilets in Gosforth Shopping Centre. Toilets available for public use as well as for customers can be found elsewhere in Adelaide Terrace, West Denton Park, Kingston Park, West Road (usually in libraries, public buildings and some, but not all, supermarkets).

Appearance of buildings, plants and trees

An attractive environment, with well-maintained buildings, and natural features such as plant boxes and trees enhances the experience of people visiting a District Centre. It was particularly noted that Chillingham Road was well provided with flower boxes and trees, whereas Shields Road had less greenery, with a missed opportunity to provide some interesting features in Hadrian Square.



Figure 8.i: Shields Road, virtual bakery, why not for real?



Figure 8.ii: Chillingham Road, making good use of wide pavement

SERVICES IN DISTRICT SHOPPING CENTRES

	Adelaide Terrace	Chillingham Road	West Denton Park	Gosforth High Street	Kingston Park	Shields Road	West Road
Transport:							
Bus routes	4	2	4	15 ² 12 ³	5	12	7
Metro Stations nearby	0	1	0	1	1	1	0
Health Facilities:							
GP surgery, Health Centre, Walk-In Centres	1	1	1	2	1	1	3
Pharmacy	1	1	1	2	2	5	3
Optician	2	1	1	4	2	3	1
Others (Dentist, Chiropodist, Therapists)	1	3	2	2	1	0	0
Financial Services:							
Bank/Building Society	0	2	2	9	0	3	2
Post Office	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Money Shop	1	1	0	0	1	3	1
Pawnbroker	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Professional Services:							
Estate Agents	0	11	0	11	0	0	0
Travel Agents	1	0	0	5	1	0	0
Solicitors/Accountants	1	3	0	12	0	4	0
Community Facilities:							
Library/Customer Care Centre	1	0	1	1	0	2	0
Swimming Baths/Fitness Centre	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
Churches/Community Activities	2	1	0	2	1	2	2
Council Offices, Police, etc.	1	0	1	4	0	1	1
Voluntary Projects	3	0	0	2	1	2	2
Bingo/Amusement Arcade	0	0	1	0	0	6	0
Social Clubs	0	1	1	0	0	1	1

² City

³ County

RETAIL ACTIVITY IN DISTRICT SHOPPING CENTRES

	Adelaide Terrace	Chillingham Road	West Denton Park	Gosforth High Street	Kingston Park	Shields Road	West Road
Shopping for food:							
Supermarkets	3	1	1	3	2	2	0
Grocers, Butcher, Baker, Greengrocer, Fish, Convenience Stores	10	6	2	4	2	14	13
Sub Total	13	7	3	7	4	16	13
Household Goods/Services:							
Ironmonger, hardware, repairs, furnishings, carpets, DIY, lighting, kitchens, bathroom fittings, etc.	7	5	1	7	4	10	2
Sub Total	7	5	1	7	4	10	2
Shops and Services:							
Hairdresser/barber	5	5	2	13	2	7	7
Newsagents, cards, stationery	5	5	2	3	1	5	3
Betting shops	2	2	1	2	0	4	2
All others – 14 categories	10	8	0	27	12	25	12
Sub Total	22	20	5	45	15	41	24
Charity Shops	1	2	0	5	0	10	1
GRAND TOTAL – ALL SHOPS	43	34	9	64	23	77	40
Empty Shops	16	11	1	7	3	23	7
Catering:							
Cafes, restaurants	0	2	1	8	3	8	4
Coffee shop, snack bars	2	2	0	6	0	2	0
Takeaway	11	14	2	13	0	9	9
Public Houses	0	1	0	7	0	7	1
Off licence, wine shops	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Other	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	14	20	3	35	3	26	14

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OLDER PERSON FRIENDLINESS AND SUSTAINABLE THRIVING NEIGHBOURHOODS

Policy for Local Services

The Summary of Findings about the older person friendliness of District Centres, based on the 7 features valued by Elders Council members, shows that all the Centres surveyed provide most of the desired features, although in varying degrees. For instance, Gosforth High Street and Shields Road stand out because they are served by the most bus routes, and have the highest number and variety of shops and supermarkets. All Centres have at least one GP surgery, access to a Post Office, and to some community and social activities, but a valued facility missing in 3 of the Centres is a Library. Although each of the 7 desired features is important in itself it is perhaps the **combination** of these features in one place that attracts people to a District Centre. Previous discussions about the importance of neighbourhoods in an Age Friendly City revealed interest in the concept of a '20 minute neighbourhood', i.e. having access to the most valued facilities within a 20 minute journey from home. This underlines the importance of being able to do some shopping, visit a G.P., enjoy a social activity, have a meal or a drink, even change a library book in some cases, all in one trip to a District Centre.

In considering the sustainability of District Centres it is possible that the commercial viability of the retail sector is enhanced if there is easy access to health and recreational activities close by, and, vice-versa, the uptake of community activities may be influenced by a thriving retail sector. The survey of older peoples' preferences has shown that local services need to be placed where residents, including older people have easy access to them, but it is also suggested that promoting sustainable, thriving neighbourhoods must take into account the relationship between retail activity and community services, as well as the views of local people using those services. And amongst local people in every neighbourhood, a substantial number are in older age groups.

Policy for Quality of Place

An assessment of the environmental features most important to older people in District Centres shows that there are some good features e.g. state of cleanliness, attention to waste disposal, but also shows that more could be done to maintain some basic facilities such as seats and notice boards. It was observed that in general there is adequate provision of bus stops and pedestrian crossings which enable easy access to, and circulation around District Centres, but the main deficiency is access to toilets. The level of these basic amenities is an important aspect of quality of place for older people. So too is the attractiveness – or otherwise – of the appearance of streets and buildings. Empty shops, shabby and neglected premises, cast a blight over an area, whereas colourful flower boxes and green spaces lift the spirits of passers-by. The ‘felt’ environment is important as well as the actual environment in assessing quality of place.

It is of concern that there may be reductions in services, such as maintenance of pavements, waste collections, and provision of flower boxes which all contribute to the older person friendliness of an environment. It is also of concern that there should be a continued support for the ways in which older people can feel they are stakeholders in assessing the quality of the places where they live.

Recommendations

Finally we draw attention to the fact that the population is ageing, and older people are significant consumers of goods and services and are active members of their communities. So we suggest planners should take note of the importance of maintaining the **range and variety** of facilities in District Centres identified as important to an older population. There is also a need to foster a constructive relationship between local businesses and community businesses, pop-up shops, and voluntary projects. We also need joint enterprises between local people and other stakeholders which could improve the quality of the environment in which we live and work, and ensure that neighbourhoods are both thriving and sustainable.

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