

Age Friendly Communities in the North – Our Early Findings

Introduction

The Northern Housing Consortium is undertaking a multi disciplinary research project to build a holistic picture of what an *'Age Friendly Community in the North'* might look like in the year 2020. The project is based on the central theme of 'inclusive design' and is being informed by developments in national policy, research and innovation from around the world and through extensive consultation with older and younger people across the north of England.

We have already published two papers ***'Inclusive Design: how a simple potato peeler can help you revolutionise your housing service'*** and ***'Age Friendly Communities - International Learning Approaches'***. These papers form part of the development work for the project. You can access the papers by visiting <http://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/Page/QualityOfLife/briefingreports.aspx>

The final report, which is due for publication in 2009, will be illustrated with a series of case studies based around the residents of an imaginary community in the north. The case studies will highlight how the home, the neighbourhood and services could be delivered in a way which is age friendly i.e. inclusive, promoting quality of life and choice.

This paper presents initial findings from the project. The paper explores demographic data on the scale of the challenge we are faced with in the north and an analysis of the qualitative data collected from a series of consultations with people across the North.

This aim of this paper is to raise awareness and inform debate and discussion with our members and wider stakeholders including planners, architects and technology providers on their vision for an age friendly community and the challenges they face in getting there.

Policy Context

A number of policy documents have focussed our minds on the need for more inclusive communities; such as the CLG national strategy for housing in an ageing society 'Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods' which can be found at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/lifetimehomesneighbourhoods>

"What developers, local authorities, planners and policy makers all need to recognise now is that older people are key to the housing market and may become even more dominant in a less buoyant market. Because the housing market is dynamic, housing decisions that older people make – whether to move, stay put, make improvements or adaptations – will impact across the entire

market. In many areas, older people are already driving the housing market, and they will do so increasingly in the future. It is not just that the housing market needs to reflect their needs, it needs to match their aspirations.”

Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods, CLG

What does ‘age friendly’ mean?

Definition:

‘An age friendly city encourages active ageing by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. In practical terms, an age friendly city adapts its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capabilities’.

Age Friendly Cities, World Health Organisation

An Age-Friendly City:

- benefits everyone: Children, the young and the old
- recognises the great diversity among older persons
- promotes their inclusion in all areas of community life
- respects their decisions and lifestyle choice, and
- anticipates and responds flexibly to ageing-related needs and preferences

The Scale of the Challenge

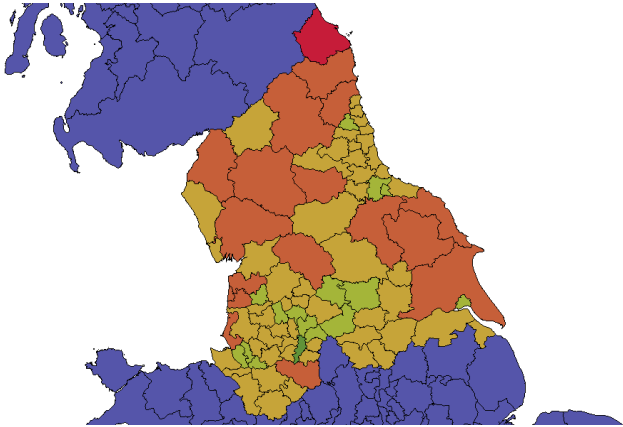
There is little doubt that our society is ageing and that this presents a number of challenges for the future. The country does not age at the same rate, and there are some interesting variations in concentrations of older people at the sub-national level that are worth investigation. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) provides population projections based on mid-2006 estimates for local authorities up to 2031 and allows for comparison between England and the sub-national level.

The number of people aged over 65 is projected to rise steadily over the next twenty-three years. By 2031, the English population of people of pensionable age will have risen by **147.6%**. In the North as a whole, this population will have risen by **143.5%** with only the region of Yorkshire and Humberside’s increase matching the national rate at **147.5%**. However, further investigation of the data reveals a different picture.

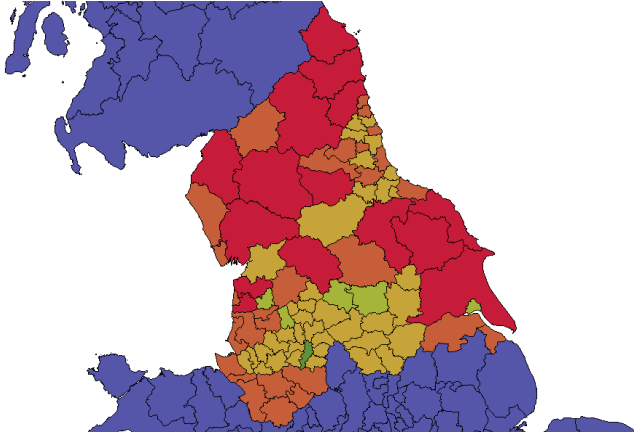
In 2008 the Northern proportion of pensionable population stands at **22.6%** of the total compared to **22%** in England as a whole. By 2031 these figures will rise to **28.1%** and **27.6%** respectively (increases of **5.5%** and **5.6%**).

The maps below show, using data from ONS mid-2006 population estimates, how the proportions of people aged 60 and over will change in each northern local authority area up to 2031.

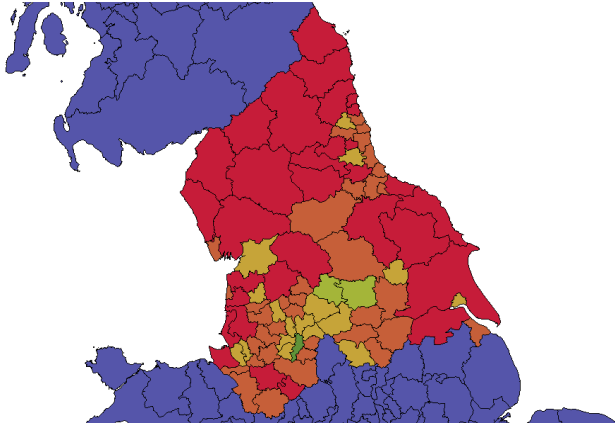
2006



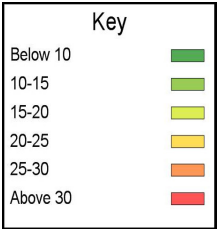
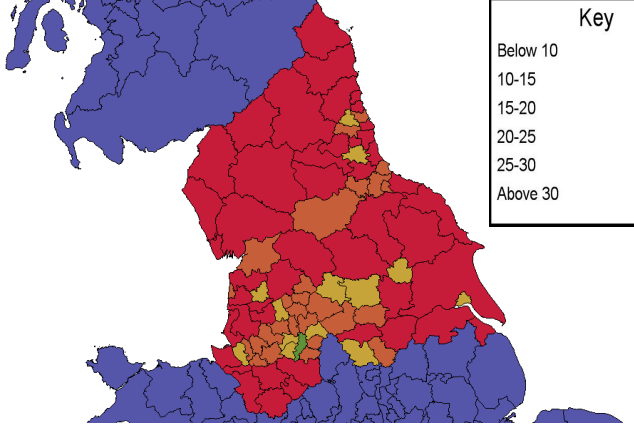
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2024



2031

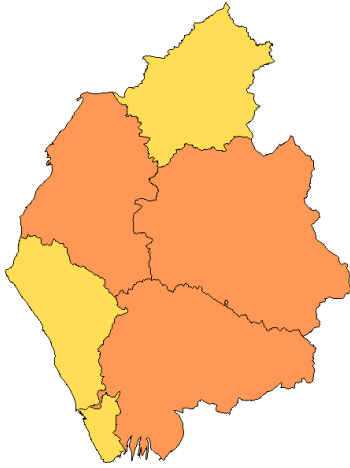


(Source: ONS, 2008)

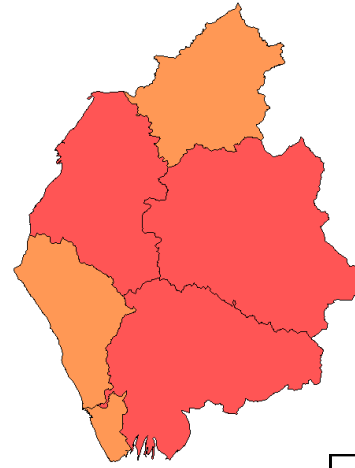
It can be seen that in rural areas such as Northumberland, Cumbria and North Yorkshire, populations of older people already outstrip those in the more urbanised areas. The more commercial and academic centres, in particular Manchester, remain below **20%** up to 2031. Below are maps showing a comparison between relative rural and urban sub-regions i.e. Cumbria and Greater Manchester. All of the local authority areas in Cumbria reach levels higher than **30%** of people aged 60 or over by 2031, whereas in Greater Manchester, the older population is not projected to reach **30%** in any authority area over the next 13 years.

Cumbria

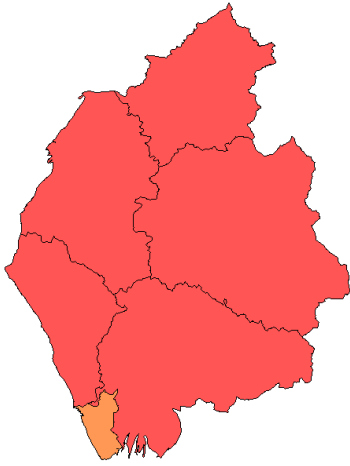
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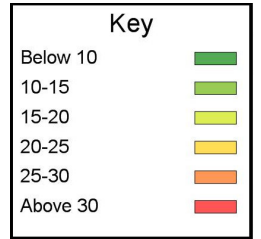
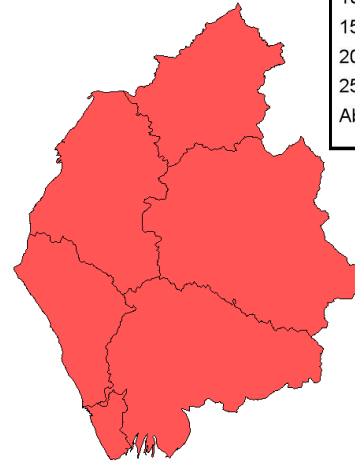
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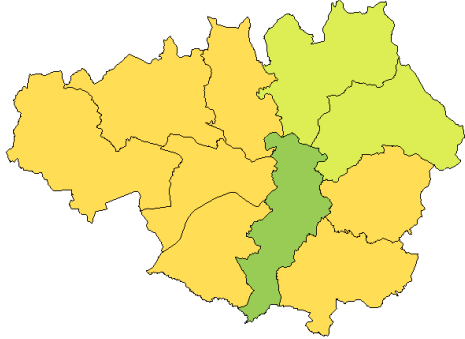


2031

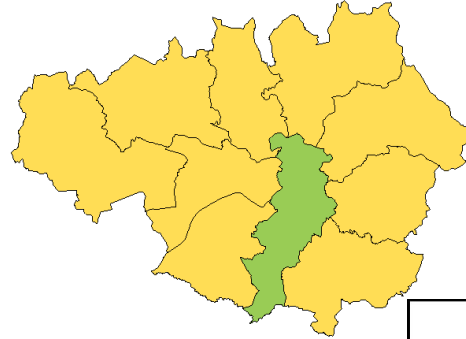


Greater Manchester

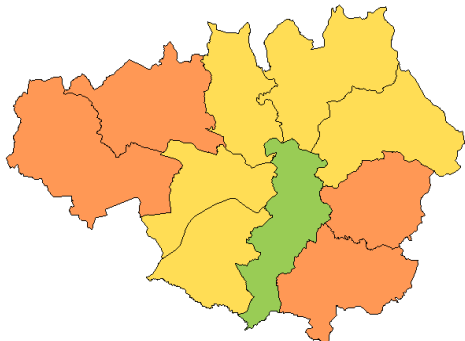
2006



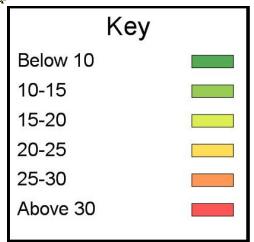
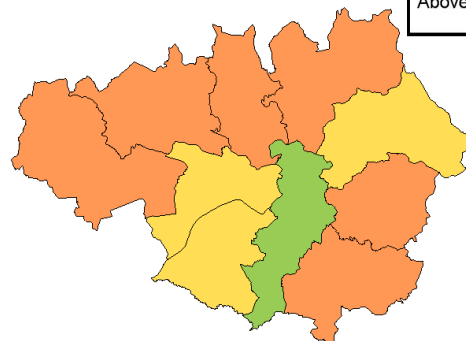
2015



2024



2031



These are typical differences between rural and urban sub-regions and they have clear implications for service providers operating in the different types of sub-region. Table 1 below outlines some key data concerning older people in the rural sub-region of North Yorkshire compared with the more urban Greater Manchester and Tyne & Wear. The table shows that older people in North Yorkshire are most likely to suffer from a number of key health and support related issues, than those living in the more urban sub-regions. Only two of the five indicators below show figures for Greater Manchester and Tyne & Wear as being higher than North Yorkshire.

Table 1: Key sub-regional data

	North Yorkshire	Greater Manchester	Tyne & Wear
Increase of people aged 75 + living alone 2008 to 2025	65.9%	39.3%	28.1%
Older people living without central heating 2008	9.3%	10.7%	5.0%
Proportion of people with a long term limiting illness by 2025	55.8%	32.4%	28.9%
Increase of people registered blind or partially sighted 2008 to 2025	71.1%	45.2%	33.4%
Proportion of over 75's unable to manage at least one domestic task by 2025	48.0%	51.7%	47.9%

(Source: Poppi website)

We know that as the population in the North ages many of older people will be in poorer health in their later years, most likely in their own homes, but perhaps in unsuitable or non-decent accommodation, homes that are no longer accessible, and without the funds to afford repairs and adaptations.

Income

Data from the Family Resources Survey shows that along with pensioners in the Midlands, northern pensioners receive the lowest gross incomes in the country. The greatest reliance on state pensions is in the North East where **49%** of pensioner couples' income and **70.8%** of single pensioners' income comes from these sources.

Table 2: Average income by region

Average income by region, 2002-5(1)					<i>Incomes in £ per week, in 2004/5 prices</i>			
<i>Results based upon data from the FRS</i>								
Pensioner Couples					Single Pensioners			
	Gross income	Benefit income	Net income BHC	Net income AHC	Gross income	Benefit income	Net income BHC	Net income AHC
England	427	181	355	331	218	132	189	160
North East	390	191	332	307	202	143	180	152
North West	389	189	330	309	205	136	180	153
Yorks and Humberside	394	184	334	311	209	134	184	156
East Midlands	366	179	313	292	204	132	178	153
West Midlands	378	183	323	301	202	136	176	150
Eastern	417	181	351	324	227	130	194	167
London	475	178	384	352	246	132	209	172
South East	518	177	418	392	233	125	197	168
South West	440	176	364	340	215	129	187	161

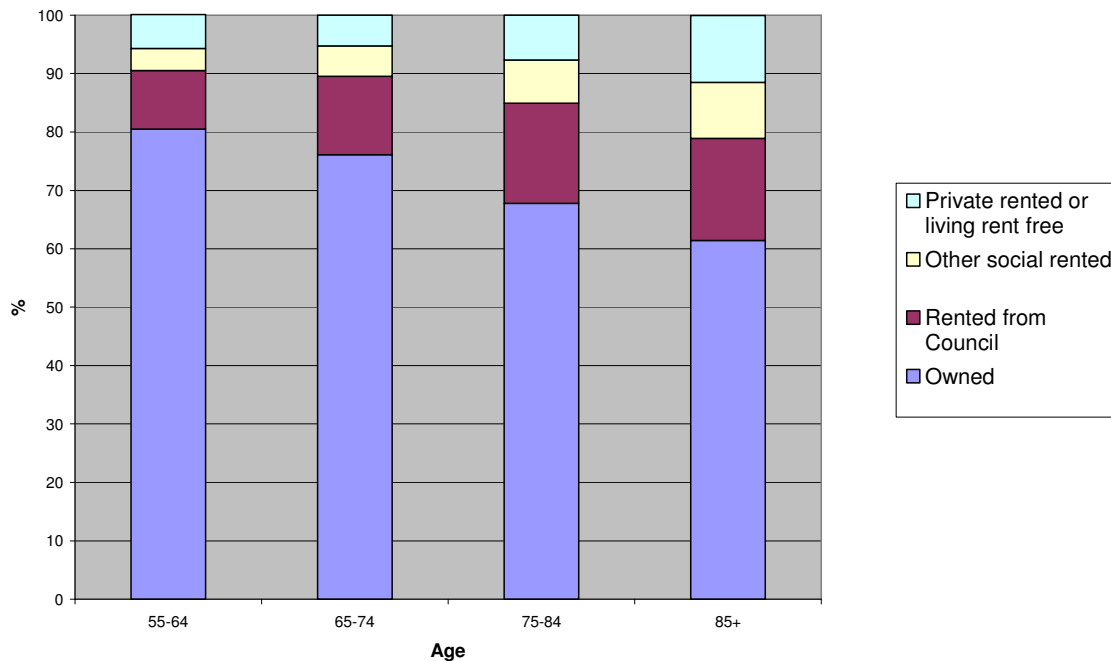
(Source: Family Resources Survey)

Tenure

National figures show that owner-occupation is the most dominant form of tenure of older people living in their own homes. However, social renting and living in the private rented sector becomes more common for older old people.

Over four-fifths (**80.5%**) of people aged between 55 and 64 own their own home while only **5.8%** rent privately. However, while most people aged 85 and over also own their own home, the proportion that do so is just over three-fifths (**61.4%**) while the proportion renting privately rises to **11.4%**, almost double that of people aged 55-64.

Diagram 1: Tenure of Older People



Health

Nationally, there are currently almost 4m people over the age of 65 with a limiting long-term illness. By the year 2025, this figure is expected to grow to over 5.5m – an increase of **42%**. The oldest age groups will suffer the most from this type of illness. People aged over 85 (**69.9%**) and 75-84 (**46.1%**) will see the greatest increases on 2008 figures.

Community based services

Information taken from Community Care Statistics 2006-07 and compared to the ONS 2006 mid-year population estimates of the 65 and over population show that there will be on average, a **40%** increase of older people receiving community-based services provided or commissioned by the Council with Social Services Responsibilities by 2025.

Transport

Data taken from the census shows that while the majority of households of pensionable aged people that do not live alone have access to transport, most older single older person households do not have access to their own transport. Almost three-quarters (**68.2%**) of single person pensioner households do not have access to their own transport, while in fewer than one-quarter (**22.3%**) of households with more than one person do have their own transport.

In-home services

Using Social Services Performance Assessment Framework data and ONS population data it is possible to project future proportions of older people being helped to live in their own home. The data in table 3 below refers to people receiving any amount of care. Such care can prevent or postpone a person needing more intensive care packages or residential care. A high figure would equate to good performance.

An average of **8%** of older people in England as a whole are receiving assistance from local authorities to remain in their own home. Figures in the North West broadly match the national average, while a slightly higher proportion in Yorkshire and Humberside receive such assistance. In the North East, **11.1%** of older people will receive help to remain in their own home and this level of assistance is projected until at least 2025.

Table 3: Proportion of older people helped to live at home

	2008	2010	2015	2020	2025
England	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%
North East	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%
Yorkshire and Humberside	8.9%	8.9%	8.9%	8.9%	8.9%
North West	8.1%	8.1%	8.1%	8.0%	8.0%

Consultation Methodology

Against this macro level backdrop the project team have carried out a series of consultations with older people across the three northern regions. We aimed to find out what issues they face in their current homes and neighbourhoods and find out their aspirations for an age friendly community based on their current experiences.

We focused on the key areas of home, neighbourhood and services and initially used a method of structured discussion around these key topic areas. This provided an insight into the many issues that people face in their home and the key areas for improvement.

To learn more about what people thought future housing should look like we used a series of case studies which looked at different scenarios for example

from the perspective of a visually impaired person, an elderly couple one with dementia and a retired single person. The scenarios were presented to the older people and they were asked to outline what age friendly would mean to that person would need based on their own experiences. The aim of this method was to enable people to think creatively and to think of positive solutions rather than focussing on the issues they face.

Consultations have taken place with 405 people in total with 7 groups from the North East, 6 Groups from the North West, 2 Groups with Yorkshire and Humber and 1 national group. The groups were:

- Bell View Group - Voices of Experience, Northumberland
- Habinteg National forum
- Devon Court Sheltered Housing Scheme, Liverpool Mutual Homes
- The Orchards, Orchard Grove, Brompton – Broadacres
- Town Close, North Road, Stokesly – Broadacres
- The Highlands, Manchester – Hanover
- Woodbine Gardens, Burnley – Calico
- Lancashire County Council - Older People's Forum
- Cheshire Older Peoples Group
- Elders Council Newcastle
- Sheltered Housing Working Group - Stockport Homes
- Stockton over 50's assembly
- Stockton Borough Council - Are you Being Served Well Event

What older people have told us

HOME

“There should be a choice available to those who want to live in mixed communities or with people of their own age”

When asked if people would like to live with just older people or in a mixed community lively debate raised in more than one of the groups. Some people preferred the security that older peoples’ accommodation provided but others thought it would be better to live amongst a vibrant community with younger people. Many groups agreed that there should be options for both and that every individual should have a choice. It is also important for those people who choose older peoples’ housing that there are opportunities for older people to still be included in the wider community.

- **Living area space**

“I would like more than one bedroom”

70% of groups mentioned that they would like more than one bedroom for friends, family or carers to stay over if required or for elderly couples who may need separate rooms. This can be an issue in the traditional models of older persons' accommodation which often have only one bedroom or bedsit accommodation. However those living in sheltered schemes commended the solution to modify existing homes to cater for a guest room. This is especially an issue for people with relatives who do not live close by.

The idea of flexible homes was introduced by a number of groups for example a room that could be used as a dining room or an extra bedroom. This flexibility will be important as future generations of older people become more diverse and family structures become more complex.

- **Kitchen**

“The kitchen should be bigger to allow room for more than one person and a dining table”

Accessible kitchens were important for most people who took part in the consultation, including features such as eye level cookers which were perceived as less dangerous, kitchen cupboards designed so you don't have to bend or reach to access and lever taps so they are easy to use even if you have little strength.

People also thought there should be enough room in the kitchen for a dining table. Reasons for this varied from the safety aspect of not having to carry hot food too far and the social aspect of eating at a table with friends or family. People also found space issues important in the kitchen within the current climate of recycling - if you have to store different materials in different places there will be a need for space.

- **Bathroom/ toilet facilities**

“I need a shower in my home as it is difficult to get in and out of the bath”

75% of groups mentioned the need for a shower in the home, as when strength and dexterity decreases with age people find it difficult to access a bath. The bathroom should be large enough to allow room for a wheelchair and carer if needed and should allow for aids such as grab rails to be installed easily.

A number of people mentioned that there should be more than one toilet in the home and if the home is over more than one floor there should be facilities on each floor.

- **Environment Issues**

“I would like to have solar panels installed but they are too expensive and I will not see the cost saving in fuel bills in my lifetime”

The issue of the environment was important amongst people consulted. They felt it was important to protect future generations but also recognised the cost saving benefits that can be achieved by saving electricity and using alternative sources of power. An issue was raised around the initial cost of these methods which would put many people off from going the extra mile and installing equipment such as solar panels. Most people were however taking steps to be environmentally friendly for example turning off lights and saving water.

- **Security**

“CCTV linked to the TV so you can see who is at the front door is very useful so I know whether to open the door if it is someone I trust”

80% of groups mentioned a desire for better security in the home. Features such as keyless entry and window locks were identified as security measures that should be designed into future homes. CCTV that can be viewed via the TV so you can see who is outside the home was seen as a useful feature to allow people to feel safe and secure in their home.

- **Garden/views**

“I would like a garden for when my grandchildren come to visit”

Having a garden/green space outside of the home was seen as important for many groups. For some it is useful to pursue gardening to keep active in older age and for others it was seen as a feature for the young people in their life to enjoy. It was also important to many participants that there is a good view from windows in the home, as people increasingly spend more time at home as they age it was considered an important feature which could improve their mental wellbeing.

- **Aids and Adaptations**

“Houses should be designed to be flexible to allow adaptations to be done at any time and also taken out easily when not needed”

Aids and adaptations were seen as a positive solution to allow many people to live independently for longer. The groups that had experience of having aids and adaptations installed felt there was a need for independent advice as to what was available. A number of respondents felt they were targeted with a sales approach rather than an approach that was led by their needs. It was suggested by more than one group to have a 'try before you buy' service which would allow people to access a test home before they had the changes made to their own home.

- **Technology**

“In the future all appliances in the home will be controlled by a remote which is good but it will have to have big buttons with big writing”

Many people felt there should be provisions to allow technology and any future technological developments to be used in their home. These provisions include ensuring that there are a number of electrical and telephone sockets in all rooms.

When asked about the future a number of groups envisaged all appliances and electricals in the home will be controlled by one central remote this was thought to be a positive thing as long as it was easy to use and the writing was large on any buttons.

A number of people consulted who had access to the internet and used it often. However there were many people who did not use the internet for different reasons - some did not want to, some didn't know how but would like to learn and others could not afford the costs of a computer and internet connection. It was recognised that to take advantage of a wider range and cheaper goods people must make use of the internet; it was also seen as a vital lifeline to some people who could not access their local supermarket who could do their grocery shopping online.

- **Design**

“The plugs should be higher so I don't have to bend, this should be done when refurbishing as well as new build”

Lifetime Home Standards were cited by many of the groups involved as positive design standards that all new homes should be built to and existing homes should be refurbished to. Examples of specific measures mentioned were wider doors and higher plug sockets.

“Our aspiration is that by 2013 all new homes will be being built to Lifetime Home Standards.” Lifetime Home, Lifetime Neighbourhoods, CLG

There were many positive solutions that were identified during the consultations that if incorporated into the design of homes and interiors would enable people to live independently for longer. These include utility meters outside of the home so they are easier to read, windows that can be cleaned from the outside or even clean themselves, doors that are easy to open and homes that are easy to maintain and clean.

NEIGHBOURHOOD

- **Parks/greenery**

“In my ideal neighbourhood there would be a park that is safe, accessible, clean and has facilities like a play park and football pitch.”

85% of groups thought that a park was an important feature in every neighbourhood, and that the park should be supervised and should be a place where people feel safe. Essential features in a park are seats and toilets, it was also thought facilities should include football pitches, sensory gardens, a bandstand, a café and play areas. There should be plenty of greenery and flowers and the park should be regularly cleaned and maintained to make it an attractive place to visit.

- **Street furnishings**

“If I know there is a seat between me and my local shop it gives me the confidence to know I have a place to rest if I need to”

A significant barrier to being able to move around the neighbourhood independently was toilet facilities and seats within the local area and in town centres. If these facilities are designed into the neighbourhood it would give people confidence to know they could rest if they needed to.

- **Layout/ Paths and Roads**

“There should be more attention paid to the state of pavements and a number to call to report any issues”

65% of groups thought that obstructions to pavements were a big issue in the neighbourhood, wheelie bin and cars were thought to be the main obstructions. It was suggested for the future design of neighbourhoods there should be places to park wheelie bins and there should be suitable car parking so people do not have to park on the pavement.

The design and maintenance of pavements was also a key issue to enable people to go out independently. Help the Aged have carried out research showing that 2.5 million people aged over 65 in the UK have fallen to the ground

due to damaged or uneven pavements. Over half of groups felt the state of the pavements in their neighbourhood was an issue; one positive solution mentioned was a publicised number to call to report any disrepair.

Pavements should be designed to be as flat as possible, have drop curbs in suitable places and be wide enough to allow for wheelchairs and pushchairs to pass each other. They should also be well lit to give people more confidence about going out in the dark.

SERVICES AND AMENITIES

- **Community involvement and engagement**

Two thirds of volunteering is currently undertaken by the over 50s. When discussing the potential for volunteering with the groups, many people mentioned a desire to volunteer, however people are often put off by the restrictions around doing this for example CRB checks, insurance and health and safety. These were recognised as being important however they should not be as tight and restrictive so as to discourage people from volunteering.

45% of people consulted recognised the need for people to be consulted in the design of their homes and neighbourhoods. They recognised that if people are consulted at the early stages of design some of the issues we have at the moment could be avoided.

- **Intergenerational practices**

35% of people involved mentioned intergenerational practices as important and also as a positive solution to tackling anti-social behaviour. One group had experience of this working successfully in practice. The older people gained an understanding of why the younger people were hanging around due to having nothing else to do and no where to go and the younger people did not realise that their behaviour was seen as threatening to the older people. This resulted in the positive outcome of breaking down the barriers both groups faced and respecting each others needs.

- **Police and ASB**

55% of people involved felt there should be a more visible presence from the police; it was also felt that there should be better dialogue between the community and the police including consultation of the services they provide and feedback when someone reports an issue.

Other positive solutions that were mentioned to tackle anti-social behaviour include CCTV systems and neighbourhood watch schemes. Some people felt it

was important for investigation to take place around why people do not feel safe going out at night.

Young people were seen as the main cause of anti-social behaviour, this is an issue which could be tackled with intergenerational activities as discussed above to break down the barrier between the age groups and understand each others needs. Other positive solutions to young people's anti-social behaviour includes parent/grandparent peer support and providing places for young people to go so they do not have to hang about on the streets.

- **Health**

The main issue identified around health services was access, with people finding it difficult to get to their GP practice or hospital. Reasons for this included the lack of bus routes, lack of parking spaces or cost of parking and taxis. A number of people thought it would be positive to have the option of health services delivered in the home or through an easily accessible drop in GP service in the community.

- **Shops and Amenities**

80% of groups involved thought a local shop which sells local produce was an important feature in every neighbourhood. It was considered important that these shops are affordable and they should be designed to be accessible to all.

65% of participants found some features in their local shops make them difficult to access; these included high shelves, narrow aisles and steps at the entrance. Other shops and facilities that people feel should be in the neighbourhood include a bank, a post office, café's, libraries and places of worship.

- **Community Facilities and Opportunities**

People felt it was important that everyone in the neighbourhood had access to community facilities, in particular **65%** of groups felt it was important to have suitable facilities for exercise in the neighbourhood and that these should be accessible to all regardless of age and ability. Another important feature identified was access to learning. People felt schools in the neighbourhood were already a valuable resource and these facilities should be opened out of school hours to provide learning opportunities to the community.

50% of groups involved felt there should be opportunities for socialising in the local area and that they should be within walking distance or easily accessible by transport.

- **Transport**

“Buses should all be low access and the bells should be in different places so I can press while I’m still in my seat”

60% of the groups consulted felt bus networks could be improved to cover more areas and to be more reliable. Consultation should be carried out with people around the bus network to ensure it meets peoples’ needs. People felt transport information should be up to date and easily accessible and that employees of bus services should be trained to understand the needs of different people.

People felt that buses should be accessible and that they should be consulted in the process of designing new buses. Some people also felt that they did not know who to complain to when they had issues regarding transport and thought there should be better regulation to ensure standardised services across all transport facilities.

50% of the groups thought the ‘ring and ride’ bus service where you can book a bus like a taxi is a very useful service for older people to enable them to go out independently. In some areas taxi tokens were available alongside the bus pass, this was thought to be a very valuable service and the groups wanted to see this implemented consistently across all areas.

- **In home services**

“I would like help with a big clean every now and again, it is hard for me knowing there is dust gathering on top of my wardrobe and I cannot get up to clean it”

70% of groups consulted would like help with small jobs in the home and gardening at an affordable cost. There was either limited knowledge of handyman schemes or they were not consistently available across all authority boundaries. It was also thought to be useful to have a register of tradesmen, this was important so that people know where they can access help from people they can trust.

It was thought to be important for vulnerable people to have access to a ‘buddy’ system where people can be visited in the home to ensure they do not become socially isolated.

- **Information/advice**

50% of people consulted would like independent advice around the services available to them and their housing options as they get older and find it more difficult to live independently.

It was thought to be useful to have access to support when moving or carrying out major refurbishments in the home, as well as the physical support needed, it would be important to have emotional support, in particular when downsizing and having to reduce the amount of belongings a person has. The co-ordination of major refurbishment works can often be difficult and support with this would be a valuable service.

People thought there should be better advertisement of what is on in the community and what is available to people. Suggested solutions included a community portal on digital TV and a one stop shop where people can access all services, information and advice in one place.

Conclusions of the consultation

Older people cannot be seen as a homogenous group - they are diverse and we must take into account this diversity when designing homes, neighbourhoods and services. It is important that people are given choice of where they would like to live and what type of housing and be well informed on the options available so they can make informed decisions on these choices.

The ability to remain independent for as long as possible is important to people and to assist in this goal communities should be designed to be accessible and safe and homes should be designed to be accessible, easy to maintain and flexible.

Next Steps

We have begun to meet with members and stakeholders to discuss the challenges that they are facing in delivering age friendly communities.

We are aware that members are facing the challenges of massive unmet needs in the context shrinking resources, the un-ring fencing of existing budgets such as Supporting People and DFG, and the need to deal with unsustainable stock. At a time when pooled budget arrangements are unclear and there's uncertainty about whether the LAA will focus on outcomes despite the intention in the current round, mixed with shrinking capacity in the care system and not least in context of the economic downturn!

But we cannot let these challenges freeze the debate on how we will meet the long term needs and aspirations of the current older population and 'our future selves'. We are interested in your approaches to amongst other things:

- Understanding the demographics and the likely implications
- Joining up strategic needs analysis locally
- Proving good quality evidence to support the long term business case for investment in prevention

- Developing a shared vision and outcomes across disciplines to enable a joined up holistic approach
- Planning new developments to lifetime standards but also retro-fitting existing homes and neighbourhoods
- Changing organisational cultures to focus everything on the individual

If you would like to be involved we would be happy to come out and talk to you, or your teams, about the approaches you are taking, the key challenges and the opportunities the Northern Housing Consortium has to support you. In particular we are looking for feedback on an Age Friendly Community Toolkit.

Please contact Jacqui Grimes for an informal chat or to arrange a visit.

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