

Involvement of older people in Age Proofing

Summary of Older People's involvement in Age Proofing

INTRODUCTION

The plan for the involvement of older people in local age proofing work was originally conceived in two phases. The initial consultation activity was organised by the Taking Part Team of Social & Community Services, and their report summarises the findings of phase 1.

Phase 2 sought to create a group of willing volunteers who could offer their services as testers of services (akin to mystery shoppers but without the mystery) upon whom designers and providers can call when seeking practical feedback on their customer experience. Preliminary attempts to secure an organisation to manage this element were unsuccessful, and so further work will be needed if this aspiration is to be brought to reality.

METHOD

Six meetings were attended which enabled about 70 older people to voice their opinions on what constitutes the greatest barriers to leading a successful and active life in later life. These meetings had a geographical bias towards Oxford City, which means that the opinions of people from more rural communities featured less. A meeting in West Oxfordshire was planned but unfortunately this never took place. The views of African, African Caribbean, Asian and Chinese older people were sought to ensure the views of people other than the white majority were heard.

Participants were encouraged to voice their views and concerns about the nature of the barriers they faced in leading the lives that they would wish. To facilitate this process a 'day in the life' scenario was created with the help of an older person who is blind. This was designed to help participants focus on their whole experience.

OBJECTIVES

The aim behind the involvement of older people was to ensure that the development of material by the project addressed the right issues. Much desk-based research was undertaken to establish known areas of ageism and to identify the known barriers that older people often face, and this local research was undertaken to help confirm how much of that evidence corresponded to the experience of people in Oxfordshire. Talking to older people themselves would also identify any particular barriers faced that were not picked up in the literature review.

FINDINGS

The older people who took part in this work felt passionately about the subject and about the importance of being able to use the services and facilities available to everyone (i.e. mainstream services).

All the groups expressed the view that keeping active mentally and physically is of great importance in maintaining health and well-being, and that they share a responsibility for making this happen.

The two most significant themes to emerge from all the comments – which were wide ranging and touched on numerous issues that could support them in living their lives – were the importance of a sense of independence and the importance of being able to get out and about easily and safely. Interestingly, many of those concerned felt that independence is not just a matter for the authorities to address but is also something for which individuals themselves need to take a greater responsibility to secure and maintain.

Other themes included the need for (sometimes small amounts of) practical help and support, cultural sensitivity in the provision of services, addressing the appropriateness of the built environment (town centres), and the need for greater age-sensitivity in the design and delivery of many services.

Participants also talked about attitudes to them as older people, and described very eloquently how they now found themselves more dependent on other members of the public. Although some of their experiences were negative, the overall impression was that people will generally offer help and support provided they know what is needed.

NEXT STEPS

The findings of this primary research have fed into the design of the age proofing 'toolkit' being developed by colleagues in Oxfordshire County Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and NHS Oxfordshire. These resources, which comprise of guidance and a series of checklists to help designers, commissioners and providers of service think in a more considered way about the needs we all have as we age, are still being tested. It is hoped that they will be implemented in the spring of 2011.

What the involvement of local people has done first and foremost is confirm the importance of taking action to address the barriers that have been highlighted. Issues which had been identified from the literature review, such as the need to ensure adequate transport or sufficient toilets and seating in our town centres, corresponded to the concerns raised locally. These issues are now firmly embedded in the 'toolkit'.

In addition a number of specific questions were added to the self-assessment tool as a direct result of the local involvement – for example, asking how bus companies ensure compliance with their driver training on age-sensitivity was added to the specific checklist for transport services. Similarly, a question was added to the checklist for the built environment asking if pavements are gritted as well as roads, as this was something frequently mentioned during the consultation process.

Some issues from national research were less prominent in the local consultation – for instance the way staff talk to people. However, without undertaking further consultation it is not clear if this means such ideas are relatively unimportant in Oxfordshire, or whether the conversations merely did not flow in that direction.

A number of specific points were fed back by the Taking Part Team to appropriate contact points with the organisations concerned where it was felt follow-up action should be taken to ensure a more direct response to the points raised. For example, specific issues regarding the provision of bus stops in Oxford and crossing times at pelican crossings being too short for people who need extra time to cross the road safely, have been passed on to Environment and Economy at the county council. A full list of these is available on request from the Taking Part Team.

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Involvement of Older people in Age-Proofing

1. Introduction

The Taking Part Team was asked in June to facilitate the involvement of older people in the development of Age Proofing. There were two phases of involvement planned, the first of which is now complete. The first phase is reported on here and its aim was to:

- Find out what gets in the way of people living their daily lives as they get older, and what helps and supports them to live as they wish
- Find out what older people would most like to see changed

What people have said will be used alongside information from research and other consultations to develop a local Age Proofing Toolkit.

The second phase of involvement will be for older people themselves to provide help to organisations who want to make their services easier for older people to use, and to support organisations using the Age Proofing Toolkit. It is envisaged that this help will take the form of a group or panel of willing road-testers/ assessors who can test or walk through a service to provide feedback on its age-appropriateness. Some members of the groups we talked to said they would be interested in being part of this, although further work is needed to make this happen.

Right at the start, the involvement exercise was named 'Age is no Barrier?' because the first feedback received was that people didn't relate to the title 'Age Proofing'.

2. How we did it

The involvement plan was to engage with older people by visiting groups who already meet either socially or more formally about the issues faced as we get older. Since July we have met with about 70 older people, 30 of whom were from Black and Minority Ethnic communities.

Some of the groups existed to bring people together over specific interests, such as transport. Some were from a particular Black or Minority Ethnic community, which brought a different set of perspectives to what was discussed. Other groups were more generic in scope but were for a particular geographical community.

Four of the groups met in Oxford and attracted mainly or exclusively Oxford residents. One of the groups met in Oxford but had a county-wide membership, and one group met in Wallingford. A focus group planned in West Oxfordshire never took place, which regrettably means that consultation with a more rurally located group of older people is limited. We did hear views about Henley and about Bicester. In addition, a few older people were involved by West Oxfordshire District Council when they met with a selection of service managers to try out the Age Proofing toolkit, which was then modified as a result of this feedback, and so were involved in the consultation process in a different way.

Two of the groups were brought together specifically for the purpose of the 'Age is no Barrier?' discussion. They were set up after advice from the county council's Community Development Team about the best way to engage with older Asian people and African and African Caribbean people over 50. The Team supported making appropriate links with Black and Minority Ethnic Communities, making contacts, advising on meeting formats and encouraging people to get involved (see *Appendix 1 example of poster*).

Thinking about what gets in the way of people living their daily lives as they get older, and what helps and supports them to live as they wish, involves a range of different areas including getting about; housing; employment and volunteering; safety; learning and leisure. For individuals, what makes a difference for them could be anything from accessible public transport to the attitudes of staff or the public.

To approach this and help people focus on their whole experience we worked with an older person, Margaret Higginson, who uses social care services and who is blind. Margaret spent a few hours with Val Wilson from the Taking Part Team, first at her home in Bicester and then in the centre of Oxford. A 'Day in the Life' of Margaret was written up and used to introduce the discussions. On one occasion Margaret came along to the meeting and told her own story. At the other meetings, which Margaret was unable to attend, Val read out Margaret's Day to the group (see *Appendix 2*). For one of the groups we showed a short series of slides showing positive images of older people living their lives.

We then asked the groups to talk about what helps and hinders them to live satisfying and enjoyable lives as they get older. We made a commitment to all of the groups to go back to them and say what had happened as a result of them giving their views (see *Appendix 3* for which groups we met).

3. What people said

The discussions were lively and interesting, and people gave rich and varied opinions, ideas and comments about how Oxfordshire services and facilities can be made more accessible to all of us as we get older, and on what helps us to make the best use of resources for ourselves.

All the groups had a lot to contribute and talked openly about the kind of difficulties they faced and the things that helped them access resources and opportunities. Sometimes the difficulties were highlighted through disability or through health concerns, but they were also brought up through experiences of discrimination or through needs that are particular to becoming older.

Some of the points raised were specific concerns to which people wanted responses. In one or two cases these responses have already been provided. The others will be passed to the appropriate person to respond. All the points which people raised were recorded (see *Appendix 4*).

Overall, people talked about a wide range of issues and what could support them in living their lives. Several of the groups made the point strongly that they too have a responsibility to live their lives as they wish. Nearly everyone said how much they value their independence.

Broadly, the discussions raised six main themes which came up in some way at each group.

a) Taking Responsibility

Older people said that they and their communities have a responsibility to come forward themselves and make the best use of resources available rather than expecting everything to be 'laid on'. The Black and Minority Ethnic Groups (BME) all expressed this view strongly, some people even saying that they think their communities can be apathetic and that they don't do enough to organise what they need for themselves, which stops people living their lives to the full.

'We should take responsibility for taking part and encouraging others to do so. Our communities are fragmented but are working on coming together' (member of African and African Caribbean group)

The reasons for this were seen as complex and included the local authorities and NHS not playing their part in developing and supporting BME groups.

'Don't just ask people to come to you, come to us. Attend Black community events and offer information. It should be a two way street' (member of African and African Caribbean group)

When the groups talked about what barriers they face, we asked them to think about solutions to these and one which was frequently raised was being more assertive about what is available. For example, there are priority seats on buses for disabled people but often they are used by other passengers. People said that it's important to ask these passengers to move and enlist the support of the driver if needed.

Coming together as a group to do something was also seen as an important way people can overcome barriers. The group of older Asian people who met in July have decided to keep meeting on a regular basis with the support of one of the county council's Community Development Officers, following the 'Age is no Barrier?' session, to set up an exercise class, go for walks and promote healthy living. Several people said how important it is for resources to be available to support people in helping each other, such as a place to meet, and out of pocket expenses for volunteers.

b) Small Amounts of Support Make a Big Difference

Low level support (described by Margaret as 'a little bit of help') provided within communities and to individuals makes an enormous difference to older people's ability to use all the same services and facilities as everyone else.

This will be different for different people depending on their needs. One person might want someone to come and read to them at home, someone else might want to volunteer in their community, go on a course, join a social group. The Happy Place (Oxfordshire Older Chinese People Centre) brings together about 70 older people each week for lunch, activities and socialising, and is highly valued. It allows people to make plans and get any help they need with other areas of their lives. This kind of support can also help people challenge discrimination and make it easier to access opportunities.

Good Neighbour Schemes, Safer Communities Forums and Neighbourhood Action Groups were all mentioned as ways of developing the support people can find in their own communities. But as outlined above, it was also said that people need to take responsibility for getting involved for these things to work. Faith groups were talked about as a way in which communities come together, and spiritual leaders were seen as a way to reach and engage with people effectively.

A 'little bit of help' was also described as technology and devices which can help both at home and outside. For example, Margaret has talking labels on her food and a device which beeps when she has filled a tea cup with boiling water. Canes with image sensors and audio response were mentioned as a way for blind or partially sighted people to negotiate physical barriers.

c) Getting Around Safely

As we get older we are more dependent on good quality, safe, reliable transport and well-maintained roads and pavements to get around. The groups all had a lot to say about this area, and brought up many of the same points.

One frequently raised issue was that pedestrian crossing times are too short to allow for people who, for one reason or another, cannot get across the road very quickly. In some places pedestrian crossings are not placed where they are needed. One person had been knocked over by cars twice at Weirs lane.

Cars and public transport

Few of the groups talked about using cars, and most people were using public transport or sometimes volunteer driver schemes or taxis to get about. Most people said how much they value the free bus pass, and those who had them also valued their disabled parking permits.

Buses

The location of Oxford bus stops in the city centre and the lack of buses which cross from one side of Oxford to the other were seen by all the groups as a barrier to going out and accessing the services they want to use. Travelling across Oxford to visit friends, for example, involves changing buses in the city centre and a long walk from one bus to the other. In rural areas, journeys can often involve three separate buses. A limited service in many rural parts compounds this problem, making it impossible to get to appointments in central Oxford before about 11am. Bus services in Henley were said to be very important to older people.

The bus stops themselves aren't convenient for the facilities people want to use in Oxford city centre – they want to get easily to the Post Office, the CAB, the library and the shops but the bus stops are a difficult walk from these for anyone who has limited mobility or is in pain. The group of Asian older people said the location of city centre bus stops is one of the most important barriers they face.

'I want to come into town to go to the library and to the shops, but my bus doesn't stop near enough. The park and ride buses have grabbed the best locations and the town buses miss out.' (member of the Asian older people's group.)

All the groups also talked about problems once they are actually on the bus – buses departing before people are seated, drivers braking too hard, drivers refusing to wait for older people, priority seats being used by other passengers, and wheelchair spaces being used by child buggies. Some people said they felt that some drivers discriminate against older people.

'I think their faces fall as soon as they see the bus pass, and the level of service falls too' (member of Chinese older people's group)

People also reported very positive attitudes from some drivers, and said that these experiences could be used to support driver training. Simple changes could be to allow people to set down their bags safely before taking fares and to make sure the buses pull right up to the kerb so that there isn't a big step to board. It is not known to what extent the same concerns are shared by residents in the more rural parts of Oxfordshire, which are generally less well served by public transport.

Roads and pavements

The state of roads and pavements was seen by a lot of people as unreliable and undermining of their ability to get out and about. This was sometimes due to damage such as potholes or cracked pavements, but could also be due to the design of particular areas. For example, some people said they prefer rough road and pavement surfaces rather than smooth which can become slippery when wet. Others find cobbles hard to negotiate.

The lack of pavement gritting last winter was mentioned several times, and it was suggested that at least crucial areas such as bus stops and by shops should be gritted, and that this would save money overall.

'They should consider the costs to all organisations of people falling, medical treatment and care needed afterwards. They could save money by spending money.'

'Who records falls? Does the JR record admissions for falls on pavements and where they happened? The information could be useful to those who repair and grit the pavements' (member of 50+ Network)

Pavements being blocked by shop stands, furniture, bin bags and bicycles were raised by several people. This is especially difficult for people who are blind or using a wheelchair. It was suggested that university colleges should provide off-pavement parking for bicycles to reduce the problem. In residential areas large bins, untrimmed hedges and parked cars are all hazards on the pavements. Most of these were seen as issues which could be addressed by enforcement of existing rules.

People felt that there are road works too often in Oxford, which can make walking between bus stops and crossing roads difficult and can also mean that stops are changed unexpectedly.

'There should be more planning with the public for work on the roads so that decisions are right the first time, saving time and money' (member of Asian older people's group)

'Why has the High Street been dug up so often and still ended up not fit for purpose?' (member of 50+ Network)

d) Town Centre Issues – Bonn Square and Queen Street

Public transport issues and the state of pavements have been mentioned in the preceding section examining the ease with which people can get out and about, but they are part of a wider issue about the suitability of town centres. The comments were mostly based on experiences in central Oxford. The way public transport has been re-designed in the city was frequently raised as a concern, along with issues around pavement and road maintenance. This is well illustrated by the Bonn Square and Queen Street area of Oxford, which was mentioned so often that it merits a section on its own.

People said that Queen Street is unsafe for pedestrians – it appears to be pedestrianised but buses still go through, and cyclists are not told to get off their bikes and walk, despite this being a legal requirement between 10am and 6pm.

The lack of kerb makes it difficult for guide dogs to know where the pavement ends and the road begins, and also for anyone using a cane to negotiate the area. In areas where no cars or buses are allowed (such as Cornmarket Street) this is not a problem, but in a mixed environment people felt it to be rather dangerous. Quieter engines mean that the buses can 'creep up' without warning.

The Bonn Square bus stop was described as having no seat, no shelter, and no kerb, making a big step up onto the bus. Bonn square itself was said to be dangerous for pedestrians and very difficult for wheelchair users. People said it is hard to walk across due to the uneven surface, and the steps are steep, have unexpected drops to the sides, and don't have any support rails.

These examples are about Oxford, but colleagues from West Oxfordshire state that in rural areas many bus stops have no seat and no shelter, which suggests that similar issues are common throughout Oxfordshire.

e) Services and Facilities and Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) Communities

The specifically BME groups which we met with brought up many common themes with the other groups, such as getting about safely by public transport.

However, services and facilities provided to support us as we get older need to take into account our cultural and ethnic backgrounds and extra support might be needed for older people from BME backgrounds to use them effectively.

The issues are not the same for each community, but there were some themes which were raised by all the BME groups. One of these was the responsibility communities have to support each other and make sure they can use all the services and facilities they need to live life as they wish. This has been described under 'responsibility' above.

All the BME groups said that many social and healthcare services are both inappropriate and inaccessible for older Black and Minority Ethnic people.

People described feeling alienated in residential care or supported living settings where there were no familiar foods available, and no-one who could speak their language. The Chinese group said their most important issue was provision of a care home for Chinese people.

The importance of interpreters was stressed by several people in all the BME groups. Older people in particular might struggle to communicate in English, and might not want to ask friends and family to interpret about personal health issues. It was also acknowledged that there are a huge number of languages and dialects which would need to be covered, and again the suggestion was that volunteers from particular communities could help here.

'Younger family members might be out at work and older people are then isolated if they don't speak English' (member of the African and African Caribbean group)

One of the groups explained that they often have older visitors who are not British citizens and that access to health and social care for them can be very difficult. Even when people are eligible for services, they may be afraid to ask and may be worried about approaching what is seen as 'the authorities'.

The African and African Caribbean group suggested identifying community champions within organisations such as Tesco to volunteer to help older people navigate the shop, and help with language.

The county council's Community Development Team are setting up a scheme to provide people with cards explaining their need for an interpreter, and giving the number of the council's Language Line, so that the service can be provided at the point of needing it.

Some people said that having someone come to their home who can speak their language and help them find out about what services and facilities are available would be helpful. The Chinese group were very concerned that the service they have from the NHS BME Health Advocates, which supports them in accessing health care, has been reduced and they were worried that it might disappear altogether in the current economic climate.

Support for carers was seen as very important by all the BME groups met with. They stressed that they believe that looking after their families and loved ones is something they expect to do, but support for this is still needed, often through meeting others in their community. The Asian older people's group said they were worried about losing the Carers' Centre in East Oxford as it was easily accessible and they could meet other Asian older people there.

As well as talking about accessing health and social care services, people in the BME discussion groups also talked about wanting to use sports centres, libraries, adult learning opportunities, shopping centres, and other community facilities. The barriers to using these were the same.

'It would be good to have a visitor centre in Oxford – it could be mobile and based in different community settings – and could give advice, information, a chance to try out activities like going to the gym, shopping trips, playing chess or embroidery.' (member of the African and African Caribbean group)

f) Appropriate Facilities for Older People

There were a number of points made which were about the particular needs of older people using services and facilities in their communities.

Public Toilets

All the groups talked about available public toilets and said these were essential if they were going to spend a few hours shopping or visiting town centre amenities like libraries and museums. People said that access to public toilets in Oxford is poor. Some businesses make their toilets available to the public, but others refuse access (e.g. BHS). Disabled toilets are locked out of hours, which was thought to be due to the threat of drug users. There were mixed feelings about this, as some people thought it a sensible precaution, while others found it an 'insult'. Some people suggested that coin operated facilities would pay for themselves, and that they would be happy to pay – however we cannot know how widely people would agree with this. Overall, there weren't thought to be enough toilets with disabled access.

Rubbish collection

People mentioned that older people living alone often have very little rubbish, and that bins are much too big and difficult to handle. Smaller properties also don't have room for big bins outside. Waste collection services were felt to be insufficiently flexible to accommodate such differing needs. Several older people said that they are good at recycling and re-using and so reducing the amount of landfill they produce, and this should be recognised as a contribution to a 'greener' city.

Commercial Services

It was raised several times that waiting in long queues at Post Offices and other services is difficult for older people. A suggestion was to provide 'fast track' queues for people who find standing for a long time difficult. The 'meet and greet' service at the central Post Office in Oxford was seen as useful, but it was felt that the service needed to be consistent and staff time for it given priority.

Some people talked about travel insurance, and said that the cost of this was unfairly high for older people. They felt that it would be better not to use age as a 'blunt instrument' for deciding who is a greater risk, but that fitness and health should be the relevant criteria.

4. Summary

The older people who took part in this work felt passionately about the subject and about the importance of being able to use the services and facilities available to everyone.

Many of the barriers people talked about were practical and some could be relatively easily addressed at low cost. The detailed suggestions and points they raised will be passed to the appropriate organisations or teams to respond to.

They also talked about attitudes to them as older people, and described how they now found themselves more dependent on other members of the public. Although some of their experiences were negative, the overall impression was that people do help and support each other, and will be accommodating if they know what is needed. This is good news for the Age Proofing project which aims to support organisations in making the adjustments which will make their services easier for older people to use.

All the groups expressed the view that keeping active mentally and physically is of great importance in maintaining health and well-being, and that they themselves are responsible for making this happen. They talked about the need for community initiatives and about encouraging volunteering and ideas like Good Neighbour Schemes. People were clear, though, that some help is needed both for starting up new schemes or to continue to support those that exist.

Finally, it was repeatedly said that older people want to know what happens as a result of this piece of work. They feel that they are often asked their views, but that they rarely hear what changes because of what they have said.

'Tell us what happened – even if it's that nothing can change, give us the bad news and tell us why' (member of the Asian Older People's group)

Several people have said they would like to be involved in the next stage of the work, and help organisations use the Age Proofing Toolkit.

The Taking Part Team has made a commitment to go back to all the groups and tell them where their views have been taken, and what has happened as a result.

Val Wilson
Taking Part Team
Social and Community Services
October 2010

Appendix 1 – Poster for Black Older People's group meeting

Appendix 2 – Margaret's 'Day in the Life'

Appendix 3 – Who we met

Appendix 4 – Full feedback



Age is no Barrier?

As we get older we should all be able to enjoy our lives and use all the same services and facilities as everyone else.

But what do you think?

Is that your experience of shopping, going out, visiting friends and family?

**Come along on Thursday 23 September
11.30am till 1.30pm at
Knights Court, Between Towns Road, Cowley**

**Share in some refreshments and tell us
about what makes life easier or more difficult
as an older person!**

Contact:

**Adannaya Chobbah (Community Development Officer) 01865 323092
or Val Wilson (Taking Part Team) 07786022217**

'Day in the Life'

Margaret Higginson June 2010

Margaret is an older lady who is blind. She lives alone and attends her local Resource and Well-being centre three days a week. She goes on trips and visits friends and has many visitors to her home, Margaret is keen to contribute to her community and to how the services she uses are run, and has carried out some pieces of work with the Taking Part Team at the County Council. She doesn't feel able to make journeys on her own but her independence is of central importance to her.

I visited Margaret at her home for a morning, and we talked through how she manages there. Margaret has some support with living at home, such as talking clocks, talking food labels and a device to tell her when her tea cup is full, and she has pre-prepared meals delivered once a day. Someone comes to help with occasional cleaning. These small supports are what make it possible for Margaret to live at home, which she values highly.

Visiting Oxford

Margaret came into Oxford from Bicester by taxi, which she is used to doing and was fine. We then went into the County Hall café for a cup of tea, and visited the 4th floor by lift. After that we went for a walk round Oxford, visiting the Post Office, the Town Hall, the Gloucester Green market and the dentist. It was a warm sunny day and Oxford was pretty crowded.

Margaret talked a bit about what generally gets in the way of her personal freedom to get about. Mainly she feels this is about confidence, which has gone down for her since she broke her leg some years back, and just generally as she gets older she feels more vulnerable and less resilient – so less able to take risks.

Practical issues are that she doesn't trust the state of roads and pavements – there was a large pot hole in the middle of the pedestrian crossing at the top of St Aldate's which could have caused someone to fall if they didn't see it. (*this is now fixed*)

Pedestrianised places are good in some ways, but lack the outer 'shoreline' of the kerb to help navigate around.

Hence her trips out are all accompanied, which limits what she can do and takes away the possibility of just doing things when she feels like it – everything has to be planned. But her independence matters very much

'If I was looked after I would be bored stiff!'

On our walk around Oxford we met several people who were very helpful, but I was also a bit surprised at how thoughtless some were – bumping into

Margaret or expecting her to get out of their way. She talked about how much more than she used to she has to rely on the public to help her, and feels it is important to see it as her responsibility to show them how to help as well as theirs to find out. On the whole, she has found asking for help a positive experience.

The following are notes on Margaret's experiences going into public buildings and public areas in Oxford.

County Hall

Automatic doors – need to be told how these work and where to find the buttons

Colours can alert partially-sighted

Reception – would come and offer assistance if someone came in and didn't know how to approach desk. Margaret offered to ring ahead – this would help reception to help, e.g. they could meet someone outside

Bollards by entrance are helpful as they are a landmark

Lifts are good, but voice isn't loud enough to tell you when you are outside that they have arrived. Blind person may also have hearing difficulties.

New Road and Queen Street

Pavements without kerbs are very difficult, and background noise plus quiet bus engines mean could be dangerous.

Crossing on the corner is good and well marked by textured pavement

St Aldate's

Walking by the bus stops quite hard as pavements too crowded

The crossing time at the pedestrian crossing is not long enough for the whole road.

Post Office

There is a person available by the door to greet people and show them where to queue and help with anything. But the greeter didn't spot us till we were leaving as she was busy with another person. Also she said there are not always enough staff to provide this service. The greeter was, however, very friendly and respectful.

Oxford Town Hall

Reception will help, and will be alerted if we use the flat entrance as there is a buzzer. But not sure how we would have known what to do – would need to be told this beforehand. Steps were ok for Margaret.

Inside: toilets good, café good, staff helpful. But there could be a handrail for steps down to café.

Cornmarket Street

Margaret found this much easier to be in than Queen Street and quite exciting as so busy but no traffic / buses. However, she did say that she has been very disturbed by being approached by healers in Cornmarket Street in the past.

Dentist (30 Beaumont Street)

Reception right by door, and the receptionist knew Margaret and greeted her by name as soon as she came in, then showed her where to wait.

Market in Gloucester Green

Margaret liked the atmosphere here, the smells and sounds, and it felt safe wandering round it.

Notes by Val Wilson, Taking Part Team
Agreed with Margaret as a record of her experiences
June 2010

Appendix 3 - Who we met

Oxford Pensioners' Action Group meeting – 14 July (Oxford)

Oxford 50+ Network meeting – 15 July (Oxford)

Asian Older People's group – 30 July (Oxford)

African and African Older People's group – 23 Sep (Oxford)

Oxfordshire Older Chinese People Centre (HAPPY PLACE) – 23 Aug (Oxford)

Transport for All meeting – 09 Sep (Wallingford)

Appendix 4 – Full Feedback from meetings

Getting around on foot and by wheelchair

- Pavements being blocked – by untrimmed hedges; concrete feet on barriers used by builders; parked cars; parked bicycles especially by colleges; bin bags; postcard stands; furniture; advertising boards
- Crossing times at pedestrian crossings are too short – St Aldates, Walton Street and Beaumont Street corner and Worcester Street
- There should be a pelican crossing at Canning Crescent Weirs Lane. One person reported being knocked down there twice
- Queens Lane – need for a light controlled crossing between bus stops – central reservation is flat and very dangerous
- Need ‘green man’ pedestrian crossings as older people may have difficulty turning head to check for traffic from side roads while crossing
- Some roads and pavements have uneven surfaces (Castle Street bus stops in Oxford; pot hole on St Aldates pedestrian crossing – *this has now been repaired*)
- Newly resurfaced pavements are too smooth and slippery when wet – prefer rough surfaces
- Roads and pavements should be gritted during ice and snow
- Low bollards can be dangerous for people with partial sight
- Large groups of young people can be inconsiderate to other pedestrians
- Cyclists in pedestrianised areas – rules should be enforced
- Subway from Cutteslowe park under A40 – dogs are left off leads; graffiti; cycling through; dog fouling – all make this a frightening and possibly unsafe place
- Bonn Square – no rail by steps, dangerous design, steps suddenly drop, very difficult for wheelchair users
- St Aldates Church – cobbles very hard to negotiate
- Road works on high street made for very long walk for people changing buses in city centre. Question – why has the high street been dug up so often and still ended up with something not fit for purpose?

- Some of the changes to roads to reduce traffic speed are also difficult for pedestrians – for example Cowley Road
- Pathways through the University Parks are not in good condition. This could be a good route for people to walk into town
- Road works – repairs are not completed quickly so that roads and pavements are smooth and safe to walk on

Getting around using public transport

Bus routes and bus stops:

- Transform Oxford – changes to public transport in city centre – has made things harder for people with less mobility and those in pain when they walk
- Bus stops in Oxford town centre need to be closer to the amenities older people want to reach – library, CAB, Town Hall. The park and ride passengers are prioritised over town bus passengers
- Local buses in Henley are very important to older people for shopping, social life etc. Excellent drivers and service, heavily subsidised by OCC – has been cut making service less good
- District Council measures air pollution and for last 8 years central streets in Henley have been 30% too high. Should be persuading people out of cars and onto buses, but this is not DC responsibility so not joined up
- Seats at bus stops aren't suitable for older people or people with back problems
- Pedestrian areas make for longer walk between buses – this could be helped if buses went all the way through to other end of Oxford (e.g. 700 Kidlington to Barton, but doesn't stop in centre)
- Bonn Square bus stop – no shelter or seats, no kerb so big step up to bus
- It's difficult to arrange transport for hospital appointments
- The bus from Cowley Centre to Abingdon Road is very infrequent (No.16 reduced service)
- Free bus passes are highly valued

On buses:

- Young people take the accessible seats, and block access to rear of bus by standing by doors
- Buses often depart before people are seated
- Buses don't always pull right up to kerb to allow the platform to be accessible
- Bus drivers have refused to wait for older person - even turned them away when they had arrived (No.6, No.4)
- Bus drivers sometimes have an unpleasant attitude – their faces fall when they see the bus pass
- Bus drivers tend to brake too hard, which can be dangerous for people unsteady on feet, or with heart problems

Getting around by car

- Disabled parking permits are highly valued
- There are not enough disabled car parking spaces at the JR Hospital – elsewhere there are enough (this was echoed by several people)

Using services

- Post office queues are much too long for older people or people with a disability
- Post office 'meet and greet' is only available at the central post office – though one person felt that this member of staff would be better employed behind the counter reducing the queue
- Despite 10 Chinese households in Anchor Court there are no Chinese-speaking staff or volunteers, and no appropriate food
- Small investments in communities are very valuable and can save money
- Access to toilets poor – at BHS need to make a purchase and then are given a code
- There need to be more toilets accessible to disabled people

- Disabled toilets are also locked, even keyed ones, due to threat of drug users. This was seen as an insult by some, but as a sensible precaution by others
(NB City Council has a rapid response to needles reported in toilets)
- There are not enough toilets in public places – could they be coin operated to pay for upkeep?
- Travel insurance – often focus on age rather than fitness. Information about companies who don't do this would be useful
- Language - particularly a problem for older BME people who may be long term visitors to Oxford and rely on their families for translation; many different languages and dialects needed; visiting the GP can be difficult and problems may be hard to discuss using a family member as interpreter
- Eligibility to use services if for example a person is a visitor or asylum seeker. Even where people have rights of access they may be afraid to try and afraid of what is seen as authority
- Cost of free swimming – this is being withdrawn for older people. Concerns raised about losing local pool in Temple Cowley which will mean it's much harder for older people to get to a swimming pool
- There was one person who lives on Hythe Bridge Street who said it was very noisy there all through the night due to Night Clubs.
- When people claim their pension their carer's allowances end – this seems very unfair and worrying (*suggested talking to Community Development Officer and Age uk for advice*)
- Worry about Chinese community Health Advocates employed by NHS Oxfordshire. There were two part-time advocates, one has resigned and is not being replaced. What happens if the other leaves too? (*Mary Hardwick at NHS Oxfordshire responded directly to this concern by contacting the Happy Place*)

Rubbish Collection

- No room for big bins in front of terraced house – ugly and in the way
- Purple bags block pavements and too big
- If people only have small amount of landfill, can't the bin be very small?
- Bins are too heavy

Solutions and suggestions

- Communities must take responsibility for themselves – will need support with this, small amounts of funding and resources
- People would like to take part in sports activities
- Continue to invest in Chinese volunteer helps people to co-ordinate Chinese people's access to social and health care, activities, socialising. This is seen as crucial for well-being
- There should be more planning with the public for work on roads and transport so that decisions are right the first time, saving time and money
- Private businesses could open their toilets to older members of the public (*there is a list available of where this has happened*)
- Further investment in the Happy Place which is seen as real value for money both for the group and the Council
- The Council's Community Development Officers are valued in helping them access information and support when they need it
- The Carers' Centre on Bullingdon Road was seen as a very important resource for the Asian communities. People said they didn't want it to close. When asked the function they valued was a place older Asian people could get to easily and meet together for support
- Bus services to Churchill hospital
- Support more volunteers in communities
- Separate fast track counters for older and disabled people
- Be assertive – ask for support from bus drivers to access priority seats
- Join Neighbourhood Action Groups and Safer Communities forums
- Clear pavements of snow and ice - consider gritting pavements in crucial areas such as by bus stops and shops – money spent will save budgets on other areas such as falls
- Consider overall costs to all organisations e.g. of falls – could save money by spending money
- Who records falls? Does the JR record admissions for pavement falls, do they record where? This information would be useful to County Council roads repairers

- Seats – chairs with arms for people with arthritis or other conditions effecting sitting and / or support for arms
- Train bus drivers in ways they can be more helpful – for example waiting for people to be settled with wheelchair before driving off and waiting for people to set down their luggage before taking fares
- Care home and / or home support services with appropriate languages and foods – maybe especially by and for Chinese people
- People would value groups to take up exercise, go for walks, talk about health and diet – *(Asian older people's group are continuing to meet with the support of the Community Development Officer to develop these activities together)*
- County Council 'Access' number needs better publicity – very good when get through
- New equipment (cane) available which contains an image sensor and gives an audio response to obstacles
- County Hall's automatic doors should be changed to not rely on pressing a button
- Announcement of County Hall lift's arrival to be audible outside of lift
- Volunteers from BME communities come forward to offer interpreting, start work with communities now
- Identify champions within organisations such as Tesco to volunteer to help older BME people to navigate shop and with language
- Card carried by person who doesn't speak English to explain their need for an interpreter and include language line number – *this is already being set up by the Council's Community Development Team*
- Don't just ask people to come to us, go to them. Attend Black community events and offer information. Two way street.
- Visitor centre in Oxford – based in different community settings? – giving advice, information, chance to try out activities such as exercise, gym, shopping trips, chess, embroidery

For detailed notes from each meeting contact
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