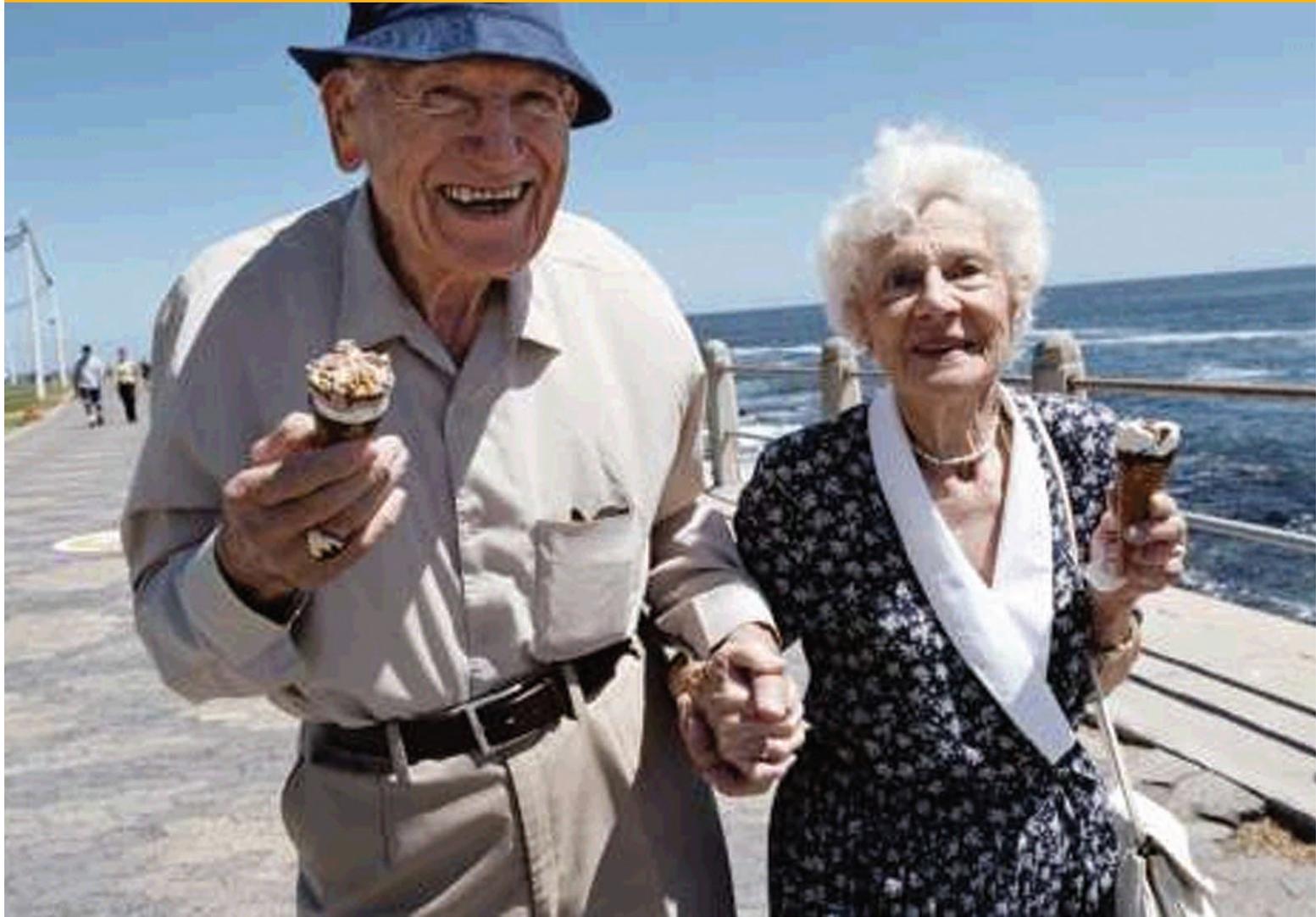


# Towards Common Ground



**The Help the Aged manifesto for  
lifetime neighbourhoods**

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## The Help the Aged manifesto for lifetime neighbourhoods

In 2001 the Government released its far-reaching plans for neighbourhood renewal which brought about burgeoning funding for regeneration across the country.<sup>1</sup> This was followed in 2003 by a Sustainable Communities Plan,<sup>2</sup> which, despite mentioning older people in only three paragraphs out of its 70 pages, provided a helpful starting point by defining what was meant by ‘sustainable communities’— places where people want to live and work, now and in the future:

- they meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life
- they are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.

These are good principles that are hard to disagree with, as have been the aims of the regeneration across the UK and of some of the discussions of ‘liveability’.

What has been missing, thus far, is some specificity on how the lofty principles of the Government’s work on place apply to older people. The characteristics that make a place desirable to work and live in change as people get older. In terms of everyday living, quality of pavements, availability of public toilets and provision of benches all gain increased significance. Incidence of incontinence increases with age: currently 3–6 million people across the UK suffer from this.<sup>3</sup> These people want to live somewhere where they do not have to fear leaving their home for lack of toilets. Equally, many older people are unable to use free bus passes because impaired physical mobility prevents them from getting to the bus stop or to cope with getting on and off, and no transport alternatives exist in most areas of the UK. This could be simply remedied by providing people with tokens to use on dial-a-ride schemes or with private taxis.

While many older people remain active into older age, for others health decline, poverty and bereavement can leave them isolated and cut off within their neighbourhoods. Help the Aged believes that more could be done to ensure that the physical design of places both empowers and enables people to be active in older age.

That is why we are launching a new ten-point manifesto for lifetime neighbourhoods, entitled *Towards Common Ground*. For places to be truly sustainable, they have to work for everyone. The manifesto is not intended to be a comprehensive list of what makes a place good to live in; rather, it proposes ten components that should be the minimum requirement for successful neighbourhoods and communities.

- (1) **Basic amenities within reasonable reach** – while everyone needs access to money, healthcare and some shops, neighbourhoods and communities that do not provide these can leave older people isolated.
- (2) **Safe, secure and clean streets** – this matters to all age groups but older people are particularly likely to fear crime. Good lighting, well-kept, clean streets and a police presence should all be prioritised, to help people feel more confident about getting out and about.
- (3) **Realistic transport options for all** – while older people are given free bus passes, many are still unable to get around because physical impairment prevents them from using buses, or because there are simply no routes. Transport options should be available for all.

<sup>1</sup>A *New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal*, Cabinet Office 2001

<sup>2</sup>*Sustainable Communities: building for the future*, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2003

<sup>3</sup>NHS Direct

- (4) **Public seating** – should be made available in many more places: having somewhere to rest means that older people can remain mobile for longer in their communities and that they can enjoy public spaces.
- (5) **Information and advice** – if no one knows about them, services might just as well not exist. Good advice and information on everything ranging from social care to local volunteering opportunities are essential for older people's well-being.
- (6) **Lifetime homes** – new homes should be built to Lifetime Homes standards and people in existing homes should have access to necessary repairs and adaptations to make their homes last for a lifetime.
- (7) **Older people's voices heard** – older people must be involved in local decisions that affect them, and their voices heard.
- (8) **Places to meet and spend time** – whether it be a public park, a shared community centre or a village hall, spaces for people to meet are vitally important to all of us and all ages.
- (9) **Pavements in good repair** – all pavements should be smooth and non-slip, with a maximum difference in paving-slab height of 2.5cm (1 inch), so that older people are less likely to fall or to have a fear of falling in their local area.
- (10) **Public toilets** – should be provided in far greater numbers as they are vital to the many older people who suffer from incontinence; without them many people are rendered housebound.

This manifesto reflects and builds upon two recent reports that started to make the case for looking at older people's needs within the community. For the International Day of Older People in 2007 Help the Aged worked with the World Health Organization (WHO) to launch a new report bringing together research from 33 cities across the world on the factors that make cities 'age-friendly'.<sup>4</sup> The extent to which older people and expert thinkers from these disparate cities were able to find common ground was

striking. The main body of the report comprises a series of eight toolkits summarising what cities can do to meet the needs of their ageing populations.

The WHO findings add weight to the argument that older people's needs must be mainstreamed in the policy debate on communities, rather than treated separately. Older people who had taken part in the research strongly wanted housing which was integrated within the community, and services they could use alongside everyone else. Opportunities for intergenerational interaction were also considered important.

Simply put, what people seemed to want was 'age equality' in their communities – urban spaces and facilities designed so that they are suitable for all, not just a few. Parallels can be drawn here to the 'social model of disability', which holds that it is not people that are disabled, but environments that are disabling. In view of our ageing population, it is essential that our communities avoid having ageism 'designed in'.

Designing-in ageism can sometimes be inadvertent, but the impact is deeply felt. For instance, pedestrianisation of an urban space might be a good way to regenerate an area, but it is vital to consider the needs of older people when doing this – for example, by putting in benches so that people have places to rest, and ensuring that transport services have adequate drop-off points in pedestrian areas.

Help the Aged continues to call for age discrimination legislation in goods, facilities and services, which will go a long way to stamp out ageism in all its forms. Clearly, ageist attitudes lead to age discrimination and ageist policies and practices, and while ageist cultures can be tackled through a variety of means, equality mainstreaming through a public sector duty

<sup>4</sup>*Global Age-friendly Cities: a guide*, World Health Organization 2007 (Help the Aged also produced a report on London as evidence towards the WHO publication which was published as *What Makes a City Age-friendly?* Help the Aged 2007) would be one of the most effective ways of

achieving change. A public sector duty for age would require public bodies to actively engage with older people and take into account their needs in planning public spaces and facilities such as toilets and benches. Age discrimination legislation would also require indirect, unintentional age discrimination to be addressed.

Another new report,<sup>5</sup> from the International Longevity Centre working with the Department for Communities and Local Government, revisits many of these themes. This report was republished as part of the Government's 'Lifetime Homes and Lifetime Neighbourhoods' strategy, which stands alongside new Public Service Agreements (PSAs) that focus on creating empowered, active and cohesive communities. In PSA 17 the government specifically tasks itself with improving older people's satisfaction with home and neighbourhood.

Given this level of ministerial commitment to older people's needs in the places where they live, now is a crucial time for forging a common understanding and establishing common ground on what this objective actually means. Help the Aged hopes that its manifesto will help

define some essential components for lifetime neighbourhoods and will act as a catalyst for neighbourhoods, towns and cities that wish to become more age-friendly.<sup>6</sup>

The wide-ranging debate on how we can truly bring generations together and create that much-prized sense of 'belonging' looks set to continue long into the future. Ultimately it seems that these less tangible aspects of community will continue to be subjective – a matter of perception for the individual or groups involved. However, if we can find a 'common ground' on the physical elements which a place needs, this could provide a useful starting point for achieving wider aspirations in relation to place. A place that does not isolate individuals physically will be one with greater potential to bring people together.

<sup>5</sup>PSA Delivery Agreements, HM Government 2007

<sup>6</sup>Towards Lifetime Neighbourhoods: designing sustainable communities for all – a discussion paper, ILC and DCLG 2007



## Access to basic services

**Everyone needs to have access to money, healthcare and basic food shops within a reasonable distance of their home.**

Britain has seen profound changes within its communities over the last few decades. There has been a seemingly irreversible decline in local services encompassing bank branches, pubs, garages, pharmacies, convenience stores and other largely private sector activities. Older people are not the only group to face disadvantage as a result of these trends, but with the multiplicity of problems they face in daily living – such as declining mobility, poorer health, diminishing incomes, shrinking social contacts – they are uniquely affected. The Help the Aged campaign on post office closures showed that some local amenities are a lifeline for older people. Yet post offices have come under considerable threat in recent years, with 2,500 further cuts currently proposed.

These issues have been highlighted substantially by the government report *Sure Start to Later Life*, which suggests that the approach of Sure Start in galvanising communities and re-shaping children's services can work just as well for older people in terms of improving access and bringing together services that address the needs of older people. This report led to the development of eight LinkAge Plus pilots, which bring together central government, local authorities and other organisations in partnerships to provide older people with access to a wide range of more integrated, joined-up services.

It is vital that local amenities are not allowed to disappear. There should, for example, be a range of measures to meet the need for banking facilities, including community banks, which act as transaction agents for several banks, and community credit unions. Private companies such as local shops and supermarkets also have a duty to ensure that their services are accessible to older people.

Physical access to health and social care services is also of vital importance to older people. Everybody should be able to access a GP, pharmacist, community nurse, out-of-hours

GP care and emergency care, if necessary via a hospital A&E department. However, such care is not universally available, and in addition some older people do not understand what services are available locally. Digital television can already deliver a wide range of services for older people, such as the opportunity to book GP appointments or request repeat prescriptions, and government needs to make the most of switchover (and other new technologies) to publicise these facilities.

### **Help the Aged is calling for:**

- **local authorities to take up the LinkAge Plus pilots as a means of providing a joined-up approach to services for older people**
- **financial institutions to introduce shared banking facilities where the market cannot sustain branches run by individual banks**
- **private companies and local businesses to bear in mind the needs of older consumers who wish to access their services**
- **government to use the GP contract to encourage GPs to consider the needs of older people, especially people who are over 75**
- **PCTs and local authorities to carry out thorough assessments of the needs of their older population and commission services accordingly**
- **government and PCTs to ensure that older people are aware of the availability of local health services and their entitlements through local promotion**
- **local authorities to make sure their Joint Strategic Needs Assessments pave the way to the creation of suitable health and social care services which are most needed for older people**
- **ministers across government to break down its silo structures and look now at the potential of technology to deliver new, better, more accessible information and services to older people.**

## Safe, secure, clean streets

**All age groups want to feel safe in their neighbourhoods, but older people are particularly likely to fear crime. As well as being clean and well-kept, streets need to have good lighting and a police presence.**

The proportion of households headed by people aged 65+ who have been victims of violent crime is relatively low. However, recent British Crime Surveys show that while less than 1 per cent of older people were victims of crime, this represents thousands of older, often frail, people. Many older people are also anxious about crime, and many do not believe official statistics which show that crime overall has fallen in recent years; fear of crime often leads to older people becoming isolated and frightened to leave the house, particularly after dark.

These findings were amplified by a 2003 Age Concern report, *The Fear Factor: older people and fear of street crime*, which found that 47 per cent of those over 75 years of age and 37 per cent of those over 50 no longer take part in social or community activities after dark because of fear of crime on the streets.

Surveys also show that local disorder and anti-social behaviour, including noise nuisance, graffiti, rudeness and rowdiness, litter and cycling on the pavements, cause a great deal of distress to senior citizens. Improvements in the layout and design of the built environment, better street lighting, reforms in allocation and management policies in housing estates, and enhancing 'guardianship' can all help to reduce crime and fear of crime for older people.

However, older people should not just be seen as 'fearful' potential victims of crime. Many are ready, willing and able to do their bit to tackle this problem in their locality. Every effort should be made to empower as well as assist older people in relation to crime. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have the potential to be the most effective possible vehicle for tackling crime, and anti-social behaviour, as described in the Home Office's publication *Delivering*

*Safer Communities: a guide to effective partnership working*. All wards now have neighbourhood police teams, but Help the Aged wants to ensure they are being effective and are including older people in their strategies. Attention should be paid in particular to older people who may be vulnerable to crime and anti-social behaviour, and may have anxieties which could be unfounded.

### Help the Aged is calling for:

- **the neighbourhood and street wardens initiative to be adopted and funded by local agencies once central funding is terminated**
- **wardens and neighbourhood policing teams to pay particular attention to the needs of vulnerable older people in their localities, including those living alone**
- **local authorities to fund and organise home security/target-hardening projects**
- **police authorities to ensure purposeful patrolling, and only in pairs if necessary, as older people find it easier to approach police officers who are not with colleagues**
- **local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to involve local older residents from the start of local crime-reduction schemes and to focus more on older residents in areas of high crime**
- **local authorities to maintain weekly rubbish collections, particularly in multiple-occupancy areas, and take steps to ensure that rubbish and recycling initiatives are accessible to older people.**

## Transport options for all

**To enable older people with mobility difficulties to maintain their independence there should be an alternative to the bus pass.**

Transport plays a vitally important role in maintaining older people's independence and well-being, as well as ensuring that communities are connected and services and amenities are reachable. With 7 out of 10 single people aged 65 and over lacking access to a car,<sup>7</sup> the Charity is calling on central and local government to ensure public transport concessions meet the needs of all older people. The new national bus pass, introduced in April 2008, entitles older people to travel free on local bus services anywhere in England; however, as the Help the Aged transport campaign 'All Change' highlights, 45 per cent of older people remain who, due to mobility problems, are unable to use buses, which means the bus pass is effectively useless for a large proportion of the older population.

As highlighted in our report *Local Bus Services and Travel Concessions*, many older people are put off using buses because bus drivers move off or stop too suddenly and often fail to pull into the curb, all of which can cause an older person to fall. Accessibility is a key issue, which government has started to address through local transport plans. However, our report *Travel, Access and Older People* showed that while accessibility issues have been widely noted, there is a lack of real action. Older people can also become very isolated because, for example, they have recently been forced to give up driving through disability; are unable to renew their driver's licence after reaching 70; or if the person who regularly acted as their driver has died.

**Help the Aged is calling on:**

- **local authorities to provide flexible alternatives to the bus pass such as taxi tokens, community transport or free dial-a-ride schemes**
- **central government to issue guidance to local authorities highlighting best practice on flexible transport concessions and to review their funding for the bus pass after**

**a year, to address local government fears that the amount of funding is not adequate**

- **central government, local authorities and bus companies to improve bus services more rapidly, with regard to both physical accessibility and the attitudes of the bus drivers**
- **local authorities to ensure bus stops are regularly inspected and both lighting and seating are provided at all bus stops, with adequate shelter, in order to encourage older people to use buses more frequently**
- **central and local government to ensure that websites and information booklets on transport networks are regularly updated for all and tailored to each local authority**
- **local authorities to build partnerships with the local voluntary and community sector and set up informal 'buddy' schemes to help older people start to use public transport**
- **government to automatically mail out information on transport and community transport services when people reach a certain age (with their pension) and/or as part of a potential bereavement package from the Department for Work and Pensions**
- **government to provide strong legislation to protect older people from age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services. A public sector equality duty that includes age is needed to ensure that the needs of older people are taken into account in the planning, design and provision of public transport services, so that older people have the grounds to challenge age discrimination where it occurs.**

<sup>7</sup>National Travel Survey 2005, Department for Transport

## Public seating

**Without benches or other seating to rest on, walking around a neighbourhood can become a real challenge for older people.**

For older people who are becoming frail and less mobile, public seating can be the difference between living a full life and feeling cut-off and isolated. Going to the supermarket, queuing at the post office, waiting at the bus stop and taking a stroll in the park can become impossible for many if there is nowhere for them to sit down. Public seating is essential for any area that seeks to be 'age-friendly', but unfortunately much public seating is becoming degraded.

As society ages it is vital to ensure that older people are involved in the planning of their communities, so that issues such as public seating are not overlooked. However, there is little sign that local, regional and national policy is coming to terms with the full implications our ageing society. The majority of projects where older people have been included in regeneration planning are service-oriented, and although some have included older people in planning bids and in delivering programmes older people have tended to be mentioned primarily as the beneficiaries of care and support services.<sup>8</sup> Older people are most in evidence in broader-based programmes with a health or intergenerational focus but they, or their representatives, are less visible in the context of projects that focus on the renewal of our cities and town centres.

Providing adequate public seating will not only benefit older people but will also help people with disabilities, mothers with small children, tired pedestrians and shoppers, which will in turn be to the advantage of local businesses.

### Help the Aged is calling on:

- **local authorities to ensure that all bus stops are equipped with seating, and that the seating is suitable for older people who are frail**
- **local government to ensure that older people's needs are taken into account when regenerating large areas such as towns and cities, and also for smaller projects such as parks and pedestrian areas**
- **every private shop and supermarket to consider the needs of older consumer, and particularly the requirement for seating**
- **government to provide strong legislation to outlaw age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services. A public sector duty for age would require public bodies to actively engage with older people and take into account their needs in planning public spaces and facilities such as toilets and benches.**

<sup>8</sup>Age Concern, *Now You See Me, Now You Don't*, 2003



## Information and advice

### **Older people need to know where to go for good advice and information on the services, facilities, support and opportunities available in their local area.**

Information and advice services are key to helping older people access services, take up legal entitlements and make important decisions. Yet funding for these services is uncertain and fragmented and government has no overall strategy of provision. Local authority planning and support for information and advice are similarly disjointed, with initiatives often having to rely on short-term funding or the voluntary sector to deliver. The presence of public services at a local level is also changing as more information and advice are delivered predominantly online or over the phone rather than in local offices.

Opportunity Age, the government's strategy for an ageing society, aims to ensure that longer life is healthy and fulfilling and that older people are full participants in society, calling on local councils to develop older people's strategies. Research by the Audit Commission to be published later in 2008 has shown how many local authorities have no older people strategy, which if well delivered could work toward making better information available on them to older people.

The LinkAge Plus pilot projects are providing a model for what can be delivered in the community information context. These kinds of support services, which people know they can use for health information, financial advice, general community services and access to self-help groups, will play an important role in a fast-moving, fast-changing society where lack of information amounts to social exclusion.

Of course, new technology could offer significant opportunities for tackling the problems faced by older people in accessing information. Yet it remains questionable whether many of the technological innovations of recent years are actually delivering better or cheaper services. We have seen many public bodies moving

information and services exclusively online, yet only 29 per cent of older people have ever used the internet.

Everyone is currently entitled to an assessment of their care needs if they appear to be in need of care services. However, the services themselves are not free and the level of individual contributions from people is dependent on their income. Help the Aged believes, and has urged in its 'Right Care, Right Deal' campaign, that as a bare minimum there should be a universal entitlement to information, advice and advocacy, regardless of income or wealth. As most people are spending their own money this is of paramount importance; it is also vital to ensure they have sufficient information and independent advice to consider all the options available and buy the best product both in terms of value for money and relevance to their care needs.

### **Help the Aged is calling on:**

- **government to commit to a joined-up strategy on information, advice and advocacy, with a focus on helping people to use their rights and to take control of the services they use**
- **local authorities to make information more widely available, and to signpost older people to the services and opportunities they need and want**
- **local authorities to take up the LinkAge Plus pilots as a means of providing a joined-up approach to services and an accessible community information centre for older people**
- **government to act now on its plans to review the digital divide.**

## Lifetime homes

**New homes should be built to Lifetime Standards and people occupying existing homes should have access to necessary repairs and adaptations to make their homes fit for purpose throughout life.**

Housing stock is a fundamental pillar of a successful community. People need to live safe, independent, active and successful lives in their own homes. In *Housing Choices for Older People* (2007) Help the Aged highlighted that much of the ongoing housing stock was built by young people for young people; it is tempting to propose that new building should concentrate on older people, and thus free up existing stock for younger households; but this, of course, would contribute nothing to the objective of multi-faceted, inter generational communities. We are left with the difficult problem of retro-fitting and upgrading our current housing to make it fit for our ageing society.

Government has in the past tended to regard the housing needs of older people as a peripheral policy issue. Regional housing strategies have rarely mentioned older people's needs. Our housing and social care agenda says that people ought to be supported to stay in their homes, yet we still make a big issue out of fitting something as simple as a grab rail in somebody's home.

However, in the Older People's Housing Strategy 'Lifetime Homes Lifetime Neighbourhoods' the government makes a definite commitment to Lifetime Homes standards for social and private housing. The Lifetime Homes standards ensure that all new homes are built and designed to facilitate independent living, making it easier to introduce essential adaptations as circumstances change. Lifetime homes are not a specialist form of housing exclusively designed for disabled people, but ones that will work for all of us throughout our lives. Opposed by house-builders, the standards promoted by Lifetime Homes are extremely modest but offer huge long-term benefits.

In its Lifetime Homes campaign, Help the Aged is calling for all new homes to be built to Lifetime Homes standards. We are facilitating local campaigners to ask local house-builders, developers, providers and estate agents how many of the properties they deal with conform to the Lifetime Homes standards. If we can demonstrate greater consumer awareness of the issue it will encourage key players in the housing market to accept the principle that homes should be built to last a lifetime.

**Help the Aged is calling on:**

- **the new Homes and Communities Agency to take responsibility for promoting Lifetime Homes and accessible housing strategies as part of its remit to encourage sustainable development**
- **house-builders to take greater account of the demographic changes which will require the housing market to be much more responsive to older house-buyers**
- **central, regional and local government to do more to promote the advantages of Lifetime Homes to the general population as part of its strategy to increase the numbers of older people able to remain living independently at home**
- **local authorities to actively encourage adherence to the Lifetime Homes standards, establishing them as a baseline for all new housing developments**
- **all local authorities to develop 'handyperson' schemes that can provide basic repairs and adaptations to promote independent living and guarantee that all older people have access to services.**

## Older people's voices heard

**Older people, alongside those in other age groups, should be involved in local decision-making and their views taken into account.**

It is no longer feasible to make assumptions about older people's opinions and needs, especially when the consumer population is ageing. Public services will need to adapt to older people's lifestyles. The number of people aged 65 and over is expected to rise by nearly 60 per cent in the next 25 years, to over 15 million in 2031.<sup>9</sup> An ageing population increases the need for public and statutory authorities to work with older people in planning future services to meet their needs. Therefore, in order for communities to adequately serve older people, they themselves must be engaged and their views and experiences mainstreamed in the design and delivery of facilities and services.

Even if the older population were to vote *en masse* for policies to benefit itself, voting is only one aspect of active citizenship. The way Britain is governed is changing, with ever greater devolution of powers away from Westminster and recognition at all levels in government that services need to be designed around the citizen. The government and Whitehall expect local authorities, in their role of community leaders, to play a leading role in encouraging community empowerment. A raft of government announcements and initiatives has aimed to more clearly set out local authorities' obligations in this area, such as the local government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities', and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act. Later in 2008 a White Paper will be published that focuses on citizen empowerment and aims to put more communities in control. Together these documents set out a vision of further devolution to local authorities, and more robust opportunities for local people to influence local decisions.

However, councils are increasingly criticised for their inability to adequately represent the needs of older people, and their lack of varied and innovative approaches to engagement. In recent research, Help the Aged found that 54 per cent

of older people claim they are rarely or never asked their opinion on issues affecting them. Furthermore, one in three older people stated that their local council does not represent the needs of older people well.<sup>10</sup>

**Help the Aged is calling on:**

- **local authorities to show an awareness of the needs of all older people in developing comprehensive engagement strategies, and of the barriers some older people experience in becoming involved in local democracy**
- **local government and local councillors to actively reach out and listen to the views of those who are more excluded in the community, thus obtaining feedback that more accurately represents the community**
- **local authorities to ensure that local campaigning structures, such as older people's forums, are better equipped and resourced. The presence of a development worker in the local authority, for example, would provide continuity when frailness or illness may mean a forum member is able to participate only intermittently, and could provide administrative support to independent groups**
- **government to release examples of good practice specific to engagement with older people, which highlights the potential barriers to their involvement and ways of getting around them**
- **government to ensure that its forthcoming White Paper on empowerment takes account of the needs of older people, particularly those who are more vulnerable and disadvantaged.**

<sup>9</sup>Government Actuary Department website, Period life expectancy, based on mid-2004 population estimates, and Eurostat New Cronos database

<sup>10</sup>Help the Aged, *Forgotten Voices*, 2008

## Places to meet and opportunities to participate

**Whether it be a library, a community centre, a public park or all of these, spaces in which people can meet and take part in activities are vitally important to all of us.**

Help the Aged believes that older age and retirement should be a time of enjoyment and fulfilment when we are able to participate fully in the community, learn new skills or take up a hobby. However, older people continue to come up against barriers that prevent their participation, and what should be an enjoyable stage of their lives can become a time of loss, loneliness and isolation.

Help the Aged believes that older age should be a time when people can learn about and participate in new activities. Opportunity Age, the Government's strategy for ageing, flagged up the importance of older people being full participants in society, and the strategy aimed to end the perception of older people as dependent; and ensure that longer life is healthy and fulfilling. This vision has yet to be realised. All 'lifetime neighbourhoods' should include places and opportunities for older people to participate in and contribute to the life and soul of the community. Such opportunities are greatly valued by older people and help to prevent isolation, loneliness and health decline.

**Help the Aged is calling on:**

- **local authorities to work with communities to support the provision of activities for older people, whether these are educational, social or health-related, and particularly to ensure that disadvantaged older people are included in outreach projects in art and other social activities**
- **local authorities and private care homes to provide residents with opportunities that secure them with a good quality of life**

- **local authorities to invest in befriending schemes to reach the most isolated and housebound older people in our communities**
- **departments across government and both the public and the voluntary sector to meet the challenges issued by the Commission on the Future of Volunteering in its manifesto, which sets out undertakings to enable greater access and get more older people involved in volunteering**
- **these agencies also to take steps to remove the barriers to volunteering: upper age limits for volunteers to be removed, and organisations to shop around for insurance companies which are prepared to provide cover for older volunteers at reasonable rates**
- **government to remove the barriers that prevent older people from participating in learning, including the need for flexible access to respite care, the cost of transport, the timing of courses, or the need to take time off work to attend a course**
- **government to provide a non-bureaucratic grants programme to local voluntary groups and local groups of older people funded by government departments and other funding agencies (such as Comic Relief) which initiate local learning opportunities, and to make funding available beyond start-up to maintain good projects**
- **local authorities to ensure older people's forums, day centres, social clubs and lunch clubs, which are key community hubs, to be strongly supported. Currently, many of these schemes are closing down due to lack of funding. They could be supported to become more diverse, and to reach out to the more isolated older population, as well as involving people of all ages**

- **PCTs to make specific efforts to ensure messages on exercise target over-65s, learning from best practice on how to promote to this group by emphasising the social side of attending exercise classes**
  - **local authorities to increase access to opportunities for physical activity, as well as exercise on prescription or referral, tailored to older people's needs, and available in every area**
- **government to provide strong legislation to protect older people from age discrimination in employment and training, and in the provision of goods, facilities and services. Ageist cultures can be tackled through a variety of means, but a public sector duty for age would be one of the most effective ways of achieving change.**



## Pavements in good repair

**All pavements should be smooth and non-slip, with a maximum difference in slab height of 2.5cm (1 inch), so that older people are less likely to fall or to have a fear of falling in their local neighbourhood.**

Dangerous pavements are a major cause of falls in the UK. A January 2008 study found that 24 per cent of pavements in the UK are unfit for use, and 2.5 million older people fell over on pavements in 2006 alone.

For older people a fall can mean broken bones that take months to heal, leaving them not only physically restricted and socially isolated but fearful of falling again and reluctant to leave the house. About 30 per cent of older people living in the community fall each year, rising to approximately 50 per cent for those aged 85 and over. Over half of all those aged 75+ who have fallen say that their fall had a major impact on their daily activities for a month or more. After a fall, an older person has a 50 per cent probability of having seriously impaired mobility and a 10 per cent probability of dying within a year. The UK population is ageing and therefore the cost of falls incurred by the NHS and other agencies is expected to escalate; already falls cost our society almost £1.8 billion a year.

However, falls are not an inevitable part of ageing and Help the Aged has been promoting falls prevention to older people since the Department of Trade and Industry's 'Avoiding slips, trips and broken hips' campaign in 2002. Since then, the Charity has extended its reach by commissioning research and resources for practitioners and older people, including advice leaflets, a book of exercises and a falls prevention exercise video. Falls represent the most frequent and serious type of accident in the over-65s, with one older person dying every five hours as a result of a fall. Falls destroy confidence, increase isolation and reduce independence. There must be greater consideration for older people and the safety of the environment in which they live and move about.

Help the Aged runs National Falls Awareness Day, an annual opportunity for the promotion healthy ageing and the prevention of falls that involves both health professionals and the general public. The Charity has also been campaigning since 2007 for local authorities to repair dangerous pavements to prevent falls and the fear of falling among older people. As part of this, the public are provided with postcards to report dangerous pavements to their council, with which the Charity follows up to check on repairs.

In 2007, in response to successful falls prevention campaigning, Luton Council introduced its own pavement reporting postcards for residents, and Liverpool Council passed a motion calling for key elements in the physical environment to form part of its performance indicators. In June 2009 Help the Aged will issue a report evaluating council responses to the campaign.

**Help the Aged is calling on local authorities to:**

- **repair pavements reported as dangerous in their constituencies, by June 2009**
- **ensure future pavements are better, and regularly, maintained.**



## Public toilets

**Good public toilets should be available in all neighbourhoods to help reduce the risk of people with incontinence becoming housebound.**

The number of public toilets in the UK has declined steeply in recent years. Until 2001 the Audit Commission carried out surveys of Britain's public toilet provision, which reported the rapid reduction. Since then, a campaigning organisation called the British Toilet Association has estimated that public toilet provision has dropped a further 40 per cent, to less than one public toilet for every 10,000 people in the UK, not taking visitors and tourists into account. Yet public toilets are essential to a neighbourhood being 'age-friendly', and without them many older people are isolated within their own homes.

There is no doubt that as we get older we become increasingly likely to develop continence issues, experiencing the need to use the toilet more often and with greater urgency. Many older people suffer from incontinence or have continence issues, caused by muscle weakness. As we age we become increasingly dependent on public toilets.

It is estimated that 3–3.5 million people suffer from urinary incontinence in the UK. However, as we reported in *Nowhere to Go*, 80 per cent of respondents stated that they did not find it easy to find a public toilet and 78 per cent of respondents found that their local public toilets are not open when they need them.

The impact of this cannot be underestimated and the lack of public toilets in a neighbourhood stops many older people from going out as often as they would like. Evidence suggests that there are large numbers of people who are tethered by an invisible 'bladder leash' which restricts their movements to within easy reach of toilets. Our report *Incontinence and Older People* also notes that there is a clear link between incontinence and social isolation and highlights how adequate public toilet provision can make an enormous difference to an older person, allowing them

to retain an active independent life. The report urges that action be taken to reverse the trend for the local authority-provided toilet facility to disappear.

The Communities and Local Government Department's *Strategic Guide: improving public access to better-quality toilets* sets out a new approach based on removing legal barriers to enable local government to raise additional revenue, by highlighting and exemplifying the local and strategic powers available, and by identifying new approaches that local government, the private sector and local communities can adopt to help achieve positive change.

### Help the Aged is calling for:

- **government to commit to commissioning a regular national mapping exercise to ascertain where toilet facilities are declining**
- **local authorities to strive for excellence in public toilet provision, and involve local people and older people's forums in monitoring standards to ensure that their needs are being met, setting performance indicators for opening times, provision and quality. Under no circumstances should public toilets be closed before consultation with local residents, and without due consideration to providing an alternative**
- **urban planners to ensure that new developments such as transport interchanges, shopping centres and supermarkets should include toilet facilities in order to be accessible to all**
- **PCTs to offer advice, information and services (beyond the provision of pads) to prevent and help treat continence problems**
- **local authorities to ensure the provision of accessible and well designed toilets in their area, with adequate numbers of cubicles, and hand-washing and disposal facilities, and which are cleaned regularly and well maintained.**

Fighting for disadvantaged older people in the UK and overseas,  
**WE WILL:**

**COMBAT POVERTY** wherever older people's lives are blighted by lack of money, and cut the number of preventable deaths from hunger, cold and disease

**REDUCE ISOLATION** so that older people no longer feel confined to their own home, forgotten or cut off from society

**CHALLENGE NEGLECT** to ensure that older people do not suffer inadequate health and social care, or the threat of abuse

**DEFEAT AGEISM** to ensure that older people are not ignored or denied the dignity and equality that are theirs by right

**PREVENT FUTURE DEPRIVATION** by improving prospects for employment, health and well-being so that dependence in later life is reduced