

Building an Age Friendly Hastings 2020 onwards

How Age Friendly are we?



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Executive Summary

This report focuses on the engagement work carried out across Hastings and St Leonards by Hastings Voluntary Action to achieve Age Friendly Communities status between 2000-2022. It encompasses the initial phase of the planning and implementation of the WHO Age Friendly Communities process.

Later in the report you will see reference made to the baseline assessment. This is a document submitted to the Centre for Ageing Better (the Age Friendly Communities national partner) in the final phase of the process. The baseline assessment is developed by Hastings Borough Council and should include a statement from the Mayor and specific Councillor input relevant to each domain.

This engagement undertaken by Hastings Voluntary Action examines the age-friendliness of Hastings and St Leonards across eight key areas or domains:

- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Transportation
- Housing
- Social participation
- Respect and social inclusion
- Civic participation and employment
- Communication and information
- Community support and health services

This engagement phase is the start of a local conversation and considers:

- What are Hastings and St Leonards strengths and areas for improvement?
- What progress have we already made?
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Achieving Age Friendly Community status is a fluid process and can take anything up to five years. It is a working assessment that will require updating to reflect change. It has, and will continue to require, the input of local residents, service users and providers, professionals, volunteers and community organisations

Hastings and St Leonards as a town aspires to become an Age Friendly Community, and Hastings Voluntary Action and Hastings Borough Council, working with older residents and other key local organisations, are now committed to making this a reality. As communities grow older, cities and towns need to become more age-friendly.

Understanding the Hastings and St Leonards context

Hastings has a similar age structure compared to the rest of England. However, it has a slightly higher percentage of 50 to 74 year olds (both males and females) compared to England generally.

Hastings has the lowest life expectancy compared to the other district and boroughs. The life expectancy in Hastings for males has increased over the period from 75.2 years (2001-2003) to 78.0 years (2018-2020). For female's life expectancy has increased over the period from 79.6 years (2001-2003) to 81.8 years (2018-2020).

Many older people in Hastings are facing issues such as health inequalities, financial hardship and poverty, loneliness and housing issues whilst also struggling to keep up in a new digital age. Much needs to be done to ensure that Hastings is a great place to age well in not just for the current ageing population but also for future generations.

Hastings Age Friendly Town Model

Hastings and Rother Ageing Network - This group was formed primarily to provide local older people's groups and organisations working with older people a platform to come together and discuss issues they are facing, overcome challenges and share resources.

Hastings Seniors Forum – Hastings Seniors Forum has been the key oversight partner for the delivery of the Age Friendly Communities work. It has worked closely with Hastings Voluntary Action during the engagement period to scrutinise progress .

Background

Across the United Kingdom there is a growing network of towns and cities working towards achieving Age Friendly status. Hastings has joined this network and is working towards becoming an Age Friendly Community and Hastings Voluntary Action and Hastings Borough Council working with older residents and other key local organisations are now committed to making this a reality.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) sets out some steps that a town/city needs to take, if it is to achieve its Age Friendly objectives. One of the most important is to do a baseline assessment of the age-friendliness of the city in eight key areas:



- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Transportation
- Housing
- Social participation
- Respect and social inclusion
- Civic participation and employment
- Communication and information
- Community support and health services

An Age Friendly Community benefits people of all ages, enabling people to actively participate in community activities. It is a place that:

- Treats everyone with respect, regardless of their age.
- Makes it easy to stay connected to those around you and those you love.
- Helps people stay healthy and active.
- Helps those who can no longer look after themselves to live with dignity and enjoyment.

WHO definition of an Age Friendly City

“An Age Friendly City encourages active ageing by optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. In practical terms an Age Friendly City adapts its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities” [Global Age-friendly Cities: a Guide \(WHO 2007\)](#).

WHO Age Friendly Cities and Communities Programme is an international effort to address the environmental and social factors that contribute to active and healthy ageing. The Programme helps cities and communities become more supportive of older people by addressing their needs across the eight key areas as outlined above.

Making cities and communities age-friendly is one of the most effective local policy approaches for responding to demographic ageing:

- The physical and social environments are key determinants of whether people can remain healthy, independent and autonomous long into their old age.
- Older people play a crucial role in their communities - they engage in paid or volunteering work, transmit experience and knowledge, and help their families with caring responsibilities.

Age Friendly Methodology

The Age Friendly methodology outlined in diagram one below has been used to steer the Age Friendly Community programme in Hastings.

This diagram sets out the “engage and understand” and “plan strategically” elements of the methodology to enable the “act and implement” and “evaluate” elements outlined in diagram 1 below to be used over the next three years to monitor progress.

Diagram 1 Age Friendly Methodology

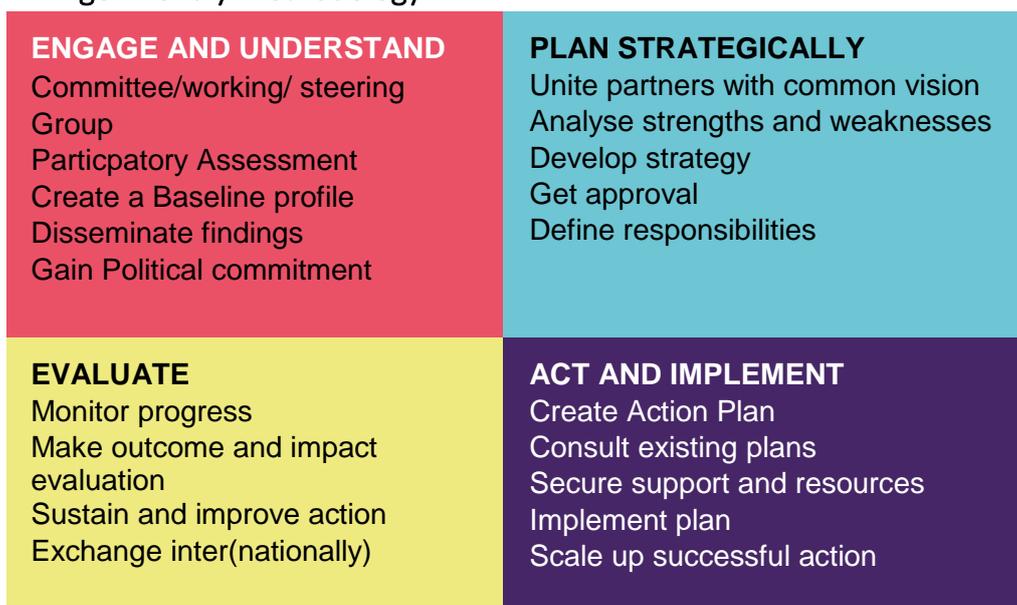


Table 1 World Health Organisations WHO Implementation timetable

1	Planning (Year 1-2):	Establishment of mechanisms to engage older people throughout the Age-friendly town cycle. A baseline assessment of the age-friendliness of the town. Development of a 3-5 year town wide plan of action based on assessment findings. Identification of indicators to monitor progress.
2	Implementation (Year 3-5)	On completion of stage one, and no later than two years after joining the Network, towns will submit their action plan to WHO for review and endorsement. Upon endorsement by WHO, towns will then have a three-year period of implementation.
3	Progress evaluation (end of year 5)	At the end of the first period of implementation, towns will be required to submit a progress report to WHO outlining progress against indicators developed in stage one.

Developing the Age Friendly Towns initial plan

An age-friendly town emphasises enablement rather than disablement; it is friendly for all ages and not just “elder friendly” (WHO: Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide. 2007) by creating:

- Barrier-free buildings and streets enhance the mobility and independence of people with disabilities, young as well as old.
- Secure neighbourhoods allow children to establish a habit of active lifestyles that can stay with them into adulthood. They allow young and old to venture outside in confidence to participate in physically active leisure and in social activities.
- The whole community benefits from the participation of older people in volunteering or paid work.
- The local economy profits from the patronage of older adult consumers.

The initial programme stakeholders Hastings Voluntary Action and Hastings Borough Council have undertaken the first steps as set out in the WHO programme for developing a Age Friendly Town including:

- Submission by the town’s former Older Person’s Champion Cllr Ruby Cox to the World Health Organisation to formally sign up to becoming an Age Friendly Town and to join the global network.
- Development of an engagement plan in partnership with Hastings Voluntary Action
- A series of Age Friendly Communities listening and informing sessions facilitated by Hastings Voluntary Action and other stakeholders.
- Started to identify funding opportunities to continue work relating to feedback from the Age Friendly Communities engagement.

Local Plan Priorities

The Hastings Age Friendly Town approach will help to deliver the Hastings Borough Council Local Plan priorities, these are outlined below:

- **Tackling poverty and inequality** – Significant levels of poverty continue to exist in many parts of Hastings and St Leonards. Working with our partners, we will take action to make things better for the many households struggling to make ends meet. We must also look to prevent people from falling into poverty in the first place, building on what we know is already working, as well as developing new ways of doing things.
- **Education and skills** – Developing skills and a strong education offer. We want productive local jobs with real career progression and opportunities to develop skills and talents.
- **Health and social care** – Working with our partners to improve health and wellbeing.
- **Economic development** – Investment that provides jobs with decent wages. We will use our power and influence to target employers who have a commitment to giving something back in return – those who offer local jobs, look after their employees and pay them well.
- **Housing** – Tackling soaring rents and a lack of affordable housing.
- **Transport** – Connecting affordable transport with jobs and skills.
- **A transparent effective organisation** – Delivering effective and efficient council services.
- **Social impact** – Using social value to make the most difference in Hastings and St Leonards. Making sure council money gets the most 'bang for its buck' for our residents.

The involvement of older people in age-friendly initiatives is a key factor in membership of the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Towns. It includes their consultation in community age-friendly assessments so that older people's views serve as a source of information for setting priorities for action.

Older people involvement and engagement is central to the Hastings model. This includes using their voice in community age-friendly assessments supporting priorities for action. To ensure as many views as possible could be heard a variety of engagement activities have taken place since the project commenced in 2020.

Hastings Age Friendly Town feedback

The follow section sets out the views of local older people that we engaged with during the period 2000 to 2022 relevant to each of the Age Friendly Communities domains

1, Outdoor spaces and buildings

Older People's Voices

Older people across Hastings and St Leonards mentioned the following priorities in relation to this domain; more benches and seating to be available; improved access to public toilets; better maintained pavements; better disabled access to Alexandra Park. Stop taxis and Just Eat vehicles blocking pedestrian access in the Town Centre. We need more places to meet; lack of good community spaces in Central Hastings which feel welcoming and accessible. Bring back Muriel Matters Tourist Info office. Shopping in Priory Meadow is not a pleasant experience anymore. Sports centres are often not easy to get too so we like town centre activity classes.

Challenge

Hastings and St Leonards could benefit from the availability of well-maintained and uncluttered pavements, access to toilets and benches in public areas. These are all important in supporting older people to live healthy independent lives.

2, Transportation

Older People's Voices

Older people across Hastings and St Leonards mentioned the following priorities in relation to this domain; better, reliable bus connections and drivers considering older people's needs; better signs at bus stops for older people; availability of hard copy bus timetables from Tourist Information offices, lack of bus shelters and seats at stops; lack of Community Transport available

Challenge

A number of key destinations for some Hastings residents are still considered to be hard to reach which can be a barrier for older people who rely on public transport to move around the Town.

More bus shelters and seats are needed across the town and timetables could be in a more accessible format.

Loss of Hastings Community Transport has created significant barriers for engaging in community activities for older people

3, Housing

Older People's Voices

Older people across Hastings mentioned the following in relation to this domain; ongoing issues with housing association landlords Optivo in particular, people wanted to be able to live in their own home (the place many had lived all their lives) and would like better information about support available to manage this when they have additional needs. They would also like advice on how to manage day to day cost of living and equipment needs. Lots of concerns around the heating of homes but many said information came too late and the Government should have been quicker to set up schemes.

Challenges

Private rented - Although there are good private landlords, some of the poorest housing conditions are to be found in the private rented sector and older private tenants are often reluctant or unable to enforce their right to repair through fear of eviction or confrontation.

Owner-occupier - A proportion of the older owner-occupiers have difficulties maintaining their homes, some of which are in poor condition and lack central heating. There are significant levels of older owner-occupiers living in houses who will require equipment and adaptations as they become less mobile.

There will continue to be a need to provide a wide range of housing choices for older people as more and more people are living longer and moving later in their life to housing with various levels of support.

4, Social participation

Older People's Voices

Older people across Hastings mentioned the following priorities in relation to this domain; information about activities and services is not always presented in an Age Friendly way, newsletters rather than social media, assumptions get made about what interests us, talk to us about local issues - regeneration and the environment, more intergenerational activities are needed; retirement planning support useful. We like learning opportunities and staying up to date with things happening in the world.

Challenges

Those older people who are living alone, not known to services and who are not taking part in local activities tend to become very socially isolated and those recently bereaved can become socially isolated in the future. More longer term intervention is needed to address these harder to reach older people.

5, Respect and social inclusion

Older People's Voices

Older people across Hastings mentioned the following priorities in relation to this domain; make community group committees less intimidating and dominated by the same few individuals; consult us on local issues - we feel our views are not considered; more notice boards, think about language and images – what ages does a group for 'older people' actually welcome? We are not all frail and walking with sticks! Please Hastings Borough Council do not always make consultations digital. We don't always like to ask for help but do appreciate it when it is given!

Challenges

Ageist attitudes are still prevalent in society and can have a corrosive impact on how older people feel about themselves and their place in the local community. Challenging ageism is a key strand of our plan to become more Age Friendly. If people can maintain independence through supportive environments, there is less need for them to require services however having insufficient support can limit coping and lead to premature moves to more restrictive care settings.

6, Civic participation and employment

Older People's Voices

Older people across Hastings mentioned the following in relation to this domain; most information is online not everyone is tech savvy; many volunteering opportunities are not ad hoc, too much red tape/training etc with volunteering, employers need to value older people; businesses do not value older people as customers, people of 50 and over with health conditions often don't feel supported by employers to stay in work

Challenges

For people over 50 staying in or regaining employment can present challenges such as having to deal with one or more health issues (often both physical and mental), and many also reported having to balance caring responsibilities. Over 50s may have lower levels of skills and less formal qualifications, and existing skills support is often not tailored to, or accessible, for this age group. As a society we must recognise and appreciate skills and experience over 50s have that aren't necessarily formally accredited.

7, Communication and information

Older People's Voices

Older people across Hastings mentioned the following priorities in relation to this domain; hard copy leaflets are better, not everyone is, or wants to be, digitally connected; local newspapers often don't cover local news, Councils expect digital access in everyone and many miss out because of this. When you talk to us about services use normal language not jargon.

Challenges

Printed literature needs to be in plain English with appropriate text sizes for an older audience to support access to information.

Services and information are moving towards being online, not all older people are accessing these. Initiatives supporting greater numbers of older people to get online, be able to use technology to their advantage and to support to buy technology are important but so is encouraging good old fashioned verbal communication.

8, Community support and health services

Older People's Voices

Older people across Hastings mentioned the following priorities in relation to this domain; Need to improve visibility of NHS staff following Covid, need to rebuild trust in health services ,up to date information on how to look after myself and decision making; face to face support is very important, community based health is more accessible than the Conquest centre, consult us on local health plans, concern over NHS digitalisation. Face to face support for things like eating healthy food, staying well etc were often requested.

Challenges

Hastings has an ageing population and it could be argued a prematurely aged population. Due to health inequalities many of our population have long term conditions earlier and die from these younger than other wealthier parts of the country.

With an increase in the older age population comes an increase in the number of people living with dementia, osteoporosis and other age-related conditions. It is key that we listen to the voices of older people and work together with them to make sure that health care services fit their needs.

Monitoring and overview of the approach

The whole programme of Age Friendly Communities work is best achieved through an approach which embeds oversight and monitoring as well as shared learning via a network of engagement mechanisms at neighbourhood level. These could include collaborative working with older people's groups and networks, the Integrated Care Board East Sussex, Public Health, East Sussex County Council, local Health and Wellbeing Boards, local authority staff, Voluntary Sector colleagues and through the Centre for Ageing Better.

Locally the Hastings Ageing Network has been the mechanism to receive Age Friendly updates, accept this report as a true reflection of older people's voices throughout the engagement period and will endeavour to hold the local authority accountable for future progress in achieving Age Friendly Communities status.



Conclusion and next steps

The period of engagement lead by Hastings Voluntary Action has involved collating findings from a variety of sources including; consulting key statutory, voluntary and private sector stakeholders; consultation events and surveys. The surveys do not claim to be a representative sample of the total older population of Hastings but findings do provide a baseline in terms of raising issues and concerns from which to begin further discussions and debate about making Hastings more Age-friendly.

In order for Hastings to continue on its journey to achieve Age Friendly Communities status there is now a need for Borough leadership from Hastings Borough Council to establish the governance arrangements outlined in this report, work with the Centre for Ageing Better to create an Age Friendly baseline assessment and to develop the action plan to enable progress to be measured.

Hastings Voluntary Action would welcome the opportunity to continue to support the local authority in this process and will continue to facilitate the Hastings Ageing Network who also have a vested interest in implementation of the Age Friendly Communities work in our town.

Public Health and East Sussex County Council are also willing to work collaboratively with local stakeholders to support this initiative.



References

- 1, *Global Age-friendly Cities: a Guide*. World Health Organisation 2007. http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global_age_friendly_cities_Guide_English.pdf .
- 2, [Hastings borough data and statistics | East Sussex: Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(eastsussexjsna.org.uk\)](http://eastsussexjsna.org.uk).