

# Ageing well in Suffolk

## Our Suffolk voices

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Trusted Insights

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# Acknowledgements

This independent report has been compiled by Healthwatch Suffolk CIC. The project was commissioned by Suffolk's Public Health and Communities team to shape and inform the annual public health report for Suffolk.

We would like to express our thanks to everyone who contributed to the Ageing Well in Suffolk Project, especially our partners and community members who shared their experiences of ageing.

**Image credit:** Some photos featured in this document have been sourced from the 'Age Positive Image Library from the Centre for Better Ageing. The photos show a more realistic depiction of ageing – to help challenge stereotypes of older people. You can find it at **https://www.agewithoutlimits.org/image-library**.

**"Keeping busy and keeping engaged in the world keeps me young."**

Read Robert's perspective on ageing well in Suffolk from page 60.



# 1. Introduction



# About Healthwatch Suffolk CIC

Healthwatch Suffolk CIC is a social enterprise delivering insight to shape local NHS and social care. We passionately believe that listening and responding to people's lived experiences is vital to create health and care services that work for everyone.

We collect and share lived experience to improve standards of health and social care in Suffolk, regionally and nationally. Our independent role is enshrined in law, supported by trusted data and embedded in local integrated care systems by established relationships with partners.

Our service is founded on long-standing values of transparency, accountability and accessibility. We want everybody to feel equally valued, listened to, seen and heard.



### Our core purpose is to...

Collect and share lived experience to influence better standards of health and social care.



### We live and breathe...

Co-production in everything possible. We are inclusive, transparent, accessible, and accountable. We believe passionately that listening and responding to lived experience is vital to create health and care services that meet people's needs.

For more information about our role, and how we are inclusive, please visit our website.

# This report

Healthwatch Suffolk (HWS) has been exploring people's views about ageing in Suffolk together with Suffolk's Public Health and Communities team (PH&C).

This project is supporting the development of the Annual Public Health Report 2024, which aims to understand local opportunities to support all residents in Suffolk to age well, maintain their independence and enjoy a good quality of life as they age.

This report features thirteen 'Suffolk voices' who, alongside hundreds of responses to this project (analysed and featured in our full report), are helping us to showcase a range of perspectives on ageing well in Suffolk.

Our Suffolk voices took part in short interviews to explore their experiences and views in more depth than our webform supporting the project would allow. The questions in the online form helped to ensure that a diversity of people with differing perspectives on ageing locally were selected.

Our full report at www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/ageingwell features analysis of more than 400 responses about different aspects of ageing well and submissions from a diversity of local partners engaging specific people and communities.

# 2. Summary of engagement



> ***"I see Suffolk as a great place to live...***
>
> ***"with access to countryside, the sea, historic places, and generally friendly people. I've been able to study and work here through my life, bring up a family, and continue well in my 80th year."***

# Our reflections on this engagement

The Ageing Well in Suffolk project revealed that many residents thrive as they age, but this has not been the case for every respondent.

Whilst it was clear there were a variety of activities, opportunities and community services available to support people to age well in Suffolk, more could be done to improve awareness of them through signposting and information provision. It was also evident that people sometimes needed guidance and motivation to engage in community activities and services.

People appreciated Suffolk's landscape, including its beaches, countryside, and access to open spaces that supported their physical health and mental wellbeing. There was a strong sense of community spirit in some rural areas and small villages, where people had developed support networks and were willing to take on informal roles supporting neighbours.

Residents were actively engaged in many social groups, activities, and community events, although some expressed a need for more diverse options to suit all interests. Some comments referenced ageing as an opportunity to learn new skills, pursue education, and build friendships. It was also evident that people had experienced personal wellbeing benefits from giving back to their community, for example, through volunteering, which gave them a sense of belonging and supported them in developing social connections.

People acknowledged the importance of maintaining health through good diet and exercise. Many were actively engaged in healthy behaviours and lifestyles. However, others had faced challenges, such as financial struggles or problems with their mobility, that were limiting their ability to stay well.

During our community engagement, we also discovered the challenges people can face as they age. These are featured throughout this document and should be interpreted as opportunities to help Suffolk become more age friendly. Examples include:

- Whilst many people appreciated the benefits of digital advances, some lacked the skills, knowledge, or confidence to use them. This should motivate Suffolk to continue to drive towards a digitally inclusive county that embraces a digital first, not digital only, approach and ensures no one is excluded.
- The importance of transport as a key enabler to people ageing well was evidenced by the number of comments respondents made about it. Having access to suitable transport was seen as essential to maintaining health and wellbeing, as well as

- preventing social isolation. While several respondents had already embraced active and environmentally friendly travel solutions and were enjoying the associated benefits to their health and wellbeing, more could be done to support and encourage people to adopt alternative transport options.
- People described how they would value better housing options that help older people live independently for longer in their community. They mentioned that new communities should be designed with the needs of older residents in mind.

While many residents were living well, concerns about future difficulties such as managing co-morbidities, disabilities, and isolation were frequently expressed. Broader societal factors, including climate change, NHS pressures, funding changes, the rising cost of living, and international politics, formed part of people's frame of reference when responding to this project and shaped the sentiment of their responses. This was particularly evident in the section on access to health and community services, where several respondents highlighted that recent changes to these services had raised concerns about the potential for further declines in accessibility in the future.

Overall, encouraging people to reflect positively on ageing has been challenging. Attitudes toward the subject varied widely; some individuals were motivated and optimistic, while others expressed fears about the impact of ageing on their lives. It is essential to reframe perceptions of ageing by challenging stereotypes and highlighting the opportunities it presents. At the same time, we must acknowledge that ageing is an indiscriminate process, not a universally positive experience.

Find the full report (from January 2025) on:
www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/ageingwell

**“Keeping well and mobile is a big part of ageing well. In this village, we have pilates and a coffee morning at church. There are also clubs to belong to, which helps you to socialise. They are all within walking distance if you can, which helps with fitness. Also, plenty of volunteering roles available.”**

# 3. Our Suffolk voices



# Age-friendly Cities Framework domains

At the request of Suffolk's Public Health and Communities team, this research has structured around a framework for age-friendly communities developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The framework consists of eight areas (domains) of the built and social environment that, when acted upon, can help to address barriers to ageing well. It considers that age-friendly communities bring together partners representing these areas to work with each other and older people to make changes.

Click to learn more about the framework.

Our 'Suffolk voices' highlights are presented on the following pages and have been aligned with the WHO domains with which they are most closely associated.

## The World Health Organisation (WHO) Age-Friendly Cities Framework




The WHO framework consists of eight domains addressing many aspects of life that are important to people in communities as they age.

**"I get personal satisfaction from knowing that I am helping to address a need within the village."**

Community spirit in abundance - Read Helen's perspective on ageing well in Suffolk from page 22.



# K's views

***"I think my outlook on ageing might be a bit different. For me, this is finally a time when I can do things I have always wanted to do."***



## Access to services

Moving from a small town in Essex to Ipswich has been quite a shift for me, especially when it comes to healthcare access. Back where I lived in Essex, medical facilities were limited, there was really only one doctor's surgery, and for hospital appointments, I had to travel to Colchester or Chelmsford.

Now, being in a larger town like Ipswich, I notice how much more immediate and accessible appointments are. I spent a lot of time choosing my doctor's surgery based on reviews, and I have found that they are very quick to refer me for follow-ups, even for non-urgent issues like my cataracts and exploratory tests for my kidneys as well. They are also great with regular preventative checks, so I have a diabetes check-up every six months or annually and I have asthma checks regularly. This preventative work is great and a reason why I have had such a positive experience.

I do wonder if part of my positive experience comes down to my being comfortable advocating for myself. So, I may come across a bit differently from other people, as I have a caring responsibility for my mum and now my sibling. Having done a lot of health advocating over the last couple of years, I might be more confident in talking to medical professionals now. I'm 61, though people often say I look younger, so I might be perceived differently than someone much older. My mum, for example, is nearly 90, and she's much less confident and reserved when interacting with doctors, partly due to hearing issues. I know it's anecdotal, but I feel that might be why I am having a different experience to some older people.

I can definitely say that living in a bigger town compared to a small rural town has made healthcare more accessible. Now, I can easily catch a bus to the hospital, and it's so much more convenient compared to where I lived before, where public transport would take about an hour and a half each way.

## Caring role

Seeing the improvements in my mum's health has been emotional for me. Before she moved to the care home, she had six A&E admissions, often not due to medical issues but simply because she couldn't cope at home. The cost of her being in a care home might be high, but the strain on the NHS when she was repeatedly in the hospital was even higher.

Now in a care home, she is able to access all the outstanding medical appointments which she had previously missed because she couldn't book online or hear the automated

> *"The stress of supporting elderly parents has a massive impact on the family's health, and we are all ageing, so it impacts the next generation down."*

menus on the phone. In the short time my mum has been in the care home her physical, mental, and emotional health has improved massively to the point it feels like I'm speaking to her from eight to nine years earlier because she was so unwell for so long. Basic things like booking appointments on the phone for people who are becoming more disabled in later life is stressful and prevents them from accessing services.

It's clear that being able to manage my mum's care more effectively has not only helped her but also lessened the impact on the rest of the family. My sibling's mental health suffered a lot while they were living with our mum. They got so stressed by her declining health that they had to be sectioned and admitted to hospital for a while last year, and they are still receiving support for their mental health.

As for me, I had to put my own life on hold; I was doing a course at the University of Suffolk, which I had to pause because I couldn't balance my studies with the responsibility of advocating for my mum. The stress of it all has even affected my health, I have needed changes to my diabetes medication, which I think is largely due to the stress of managing everything. The stress of supporting elderly parents has a massive impact on the family's health, and we are all ageing, so it impacts the next generation down."

## Education

One of the things I wanted to do for a long time was write a book. With both my daughters now grown and independent, I decided to enrol in university to finally pursue this. Although it's been tough juggling my studies with care-giving, I am now in my second year and find the university environment really positive and supportive, especially for mature students.

I think my outlook on ageing might be a bit different because, for me, this is finally a time when I can do the things I have always wanted to do. During my marriage, there were a lot of things I had to put on hold, and now that my daughters are independent, I don't want to waste any more time."

## Attitudes towards ageing

I often notice misconceptions around ageing. As people visibly age, society's attitudes do change. For people who are much older, the assumption can be that you do not understand and that can be hard for a lot of older people as they feel they aren't being listened to. I think it happens a lot where there is this bias towards younger people and referring to the younger person in the room instead of speaking directly with the older person. It's a shame; I think it makes older people feel disempowered.

There is also this assumption that older people have all the time in the world. In reality, just because you are older doesn't mean you are time-rich or even money-rich. Many of us are still very busy, particularly those with caring responsibilities.

For healthcare professionals, I think it's important to remember that just because older people might have different ways of understanding and communicating, it doesn't mean they can't engage in their own care. It's more about meeting them where they are and not making assumptions based on age. It's important for older people to still feel like they are part of their own healthcare decisions.

Lastly, one of the biggest things is economic stability. A lot of people I know locally are struggling financially, which makes it all the more important to have affordable options in towns like budget shops. This is one of my

biggest worries about growing older ensuring I can stay financially secure. It's something I think about a lot, and I know I'm not alone in that."

# Denise's views

***"..it's always our generation who hold things up because of community spirit & strong will to help others despite our own increasing health challenges..."***



## Access to services

My husband has complex health needs and is undergoing ongoing treatment and assessment, but the waiting lists stretch on for months and months. His medication helps manage his condition now, but he often needs urgent medical attention.

We live in a rural area and don't drive, so when he needs to get to A&E, we must find various ways to get to the hospital – by ambulance if one is available, by taxi, or community transport (though that must be booked in advance). My son helps when he's not working and we have good neighbours, but it's about having plans. Once we get to the hospital, we often wait in the ambulance for hours before being seen.

Things should improve because Ipswich Hospital is expanding its A&E from nine bays to 19, so there's hope that they can absorb more people. I've even spent one night sleeping on the floor under a bed when my husband was waiting for a ward. Once, he was placed next to a person who was dying in dreadful pain, with no screen separating her from the other patients. We could hear and see everything that happened. It was very distressing and disrespectful and showed a lack of care for all concerned."

A&E was often mayhem with people in need of care, dealing with drunkenness, anger, pain, and various dependencies and emergencies. I imagine the medical staff are under so much stress, which could cause them to be less caring than they should be, and they may protect themselves by inappropriate chatting. The health services face many demands. There isn't enough infrastructure but there are still lots who care in society. We often hear bad news, but we need to celebrate what we can and try to improve for the future.

## Solution to access

To mend the NHS, I think it comes down to investment and more money being spent. Cardiac and neurology services are among the most in demand, especially for older people. The infrastructure, facilities and staff training require more salaries to keep up. There has been serious under investment for many years and the population is rising rapidly. It's getting to the point where the infrastructure and staff levels are not sufficient to match demand. At the end of the day, we need highly skilled staff. This takes time to cover training and requires investment.

## Digital access

Things have changed a lot, and GP workloads

> *"...young people aren't learning life skills as readily or how to contribute. I sometimes chat with young people in the village, and once they gain confidence and skills, they enjoy being involved. "*

need to be monitored so they don't burn out by heavy demands from an increasing population, especially as older people require more medication which has a cost to the surgeries.

The digital age has changed how people communicate, and while younger generations are more comfortable with it, older people are having to adapt to making appointments or getting results via smartphones. There is a real question mark as to how some older people are coping if they can't access the internet for health-related matters. Many need guidance to navigate what feels like an alien system.

I'm part of our surgery's new Patient Participation Group (PPG), and we're discussing how to help people with these new systems. We need to properly consult with people to learn what they are struggling with and give them a voice. It's about communication and consulting with people prior to a crisis rather than when we are in it.

## Transportation

Transport is another issue, and sometimes ambulance calls are not urgent. We used to have the first responder system which meant that people had already received some first aid or help before the ambulance service arrived. It's difficult to recruit to this service though because younger people are unable to fill the need due to family and work commitments. The older retired people who keep the First Responder Service going are often unable to continue for health reasons."

We have a new minibus in the village, which is good, but it's difficult for older people with mobility problems to get on and off, whereas the coach we used to have was much easier.

## Social interaction

It seems like it's always our generation, the over 60s who hold things up because of community spirit and strong will to help others and organise clubs, despite our own increasing health challenges and energy levels.

There is also an issue to support and guide younger people, including adolescents, who will one day be older people but don't seem to be integrating with older folk. We had youth groups and activities and had a lot of support as young people. We ran youth clubs and summer camps and evolved the community spirit. Now, young people aren't learning life skills as readily or how to contribute. I sometimes chat with young people in the village, and once they gain confidence and skills, they enjoy being involved. There is also a need to know about safeguarding and risk so everything becomes hard work before you can set any groups up.

I don't think we're doing enough to promote healthy living. What is important in life is to keep us functioning like healthy diet, exercise, calmness, wellbeing, social contact, financial security, low maintenance homes, transport access, safety both public and domestic. I think vulnerability must be supported and if you don't support your vulnerable ones they will suffer.

I don't think enough people think about getting older, and as soon as you have things removed you become isolated.

**“I am 86 and still living an independent life. I have long-term illnesses, so access to health services via hospital transport is very important to me. This helps me maintain self-respect and my individuality. I have lived in Suffolk for eight years and from personal experiences the excellence of the health service in this area is well above average.”**

Read more perspectives on access to health and community services in our full report:
www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/ageingwell/

# Robert's views

***"When you get older you get to do the things you couldn't when you were younger. So why waste your time sitting around."***



I was born in Essex and raised in Suffolk and moved back to Leiston where I spent my teenage years and met my wife, just over a year ago. For almost 40 years we lived in Lincolnshire, Yorkshire and then Norfolk, but love being back in Suffolk. We feel as though we've come home.

## Career

I've had a varied career, sometimes employed but mostly working for myself. Over the years I've had more than 20 books published, with my first book being published in 2002. My most recent, *Where Are the Fellows Who Cut the Hay*, builds on those by oral historian George Ewart Evans, and I plan to continue writing about people and place and am currently working on a book titled *Down to Earth* which will be published early in 2026.

I'm 69 now, an age when most are content to potter in the garden or watch TV, but as an author, I can continue to work, and be recognised and valued, into old age. For my next book I'm meeting lots of interesting people, from gardeners to farmers, naturists to naturalists, archaeologists to climate change activists. Keeping busy and keeping engaged in the world keeps me young.

I'm reading a lot too, enjoy long bike rides and have a weekly personal training session at the gym. I'm lifting more weight now than I could 10 years ago. Age is after all, just a number, not an excuse for inactivity.

I've also started Leiston Book Festival, which focuses on nature writing. We had more than 100 people at the first one and already, people are signing up for the 2025 festival, which will take place on Saturday 20th September. When you get older you can do the things you couldn't do when you were younger. So why waste your time sitting around.

## Education

It has only been in the last few years since taking a creative writing MA at UEA that I have changed the genre of what I write about. I didn't go to university when I was young and so, to go at 64 was amazing. I spent a whole year suffering from imposter syndrome, thinking I shouldn't be here. This time out really provided me with an opportunity to look at how I spent my time.

George Bernard Shaw once said that 'education is wasted on the young'. What he didn't say, so I'll say for him, is that you really are never too young to learn, to develop new skills, and embark on a new career. For my MA group I was in a group of 14 people who came from all over the world and were aged between mid-20s to mid-70s. I think people

> *"I'm reading a lot too, enjoy long bike rides and have a weekly personal training session at the gym. I'm lifting more weight now than I could 10 years ago. Age is after all, just a number, not an excuse for inactivity."*

need to be encouraged to do it, whatever age they are. Going back into education at 64, after more than 40 years was a life changing experience.

## Thoughts of ageing

I still drive but I know there will come a day when I don't want to do that anymore. The thing is you get to my age, and you know what is coming having seen parents, uncles and aunts grow old and die. You can keep old age at bay for so long, but eventually, I know I will become less able and then die.

I think it's important to just try new things as well. I started playing piano at 60 and I am now between grade four and five. It's important to make time for that because I will be able to enjoy playing the piano when too old to go to the gym or out on my bike.

I think one of the biggest barriers to ageing is around the NHS and access to health because it is such a clunky system. They still write letters, use faxes and expect you to ring and wait in a queue to get an appointment. I live with depression and have to be quite resourceful at times to navigate the system and get the help I need. I find my GP practice in Leiston more responsive than others I've been with, but you really shouldn't have to game the system to get what you need.

Finally, nobody in my family has reached the age of 90, so I'm expecting to die in the first half of 2045. I might live longer but knowing that I have 20 years left means I can make sure I use that time wisely.

> *"I find my GP practice in Leiston more responsive than others I've been with.*

> ***"..But you really shouldn't have to game the system to get what you need."***

# Tony's views

***"It's hard, but I find it hugely rewarding to give back to these people, even if it puts just one more smile on their face than they have had before."***




## Volunteer & employment & social participation

I'm a golf professional by trade and general manager of Seckford Golf Club near Woodbridge. I've always passionate about helping people.

My mum had dementia for 13 years, and now my dad is in his 90s and no longer really knows anyone. I started volunteering at Ipswich Town Football Club's Golden Days Café for people with dementia, and that's where I met Wendy from Home Instead. We got chatting, and I realised that, with her help and that of Home Instead, we could do something similar at the Golf Club.

I was keen to offer people the opportunity to get outside, be active and use the golfing facilities. Golf courses are wonderful places for people to come to because they're nice open spaces. Walking on uneven surfaces is great for maintaining mobility. It's good for the person's strength and their control, and it keeps their minds working actively.

Seckford Golf Club (with the support of Wendy and Home Instead) have been offering dementia golf sessions for two years now. We started with one session a month and have extended that to two. We are struggling to cope with the amount of demand there is because once people have tried it, they want to keep coming. We could fill all our time just with dementia sessions. That's why I'm trying to get other clubs to come on board.

We have a fantastic team of over 25 volunteers of all ages, all who have received dementia awareness training. A few of our volunteers come from other golf clubs in the area. We limit the sessions to 12 people with dementia and 12 carers to make sure we can provide 1:1 support.

> *"We are struggling to cope with the amount of demand there is because once people have tried it, they want to keep coming. We could fill all our time just with dementia sessions. That's why I'm trying to get other clubs to come on board."*

**Domain:**
Employment and volunteering

The volunteers love it, they get bought into it. It is like a big family now.

During our sessions, if people are able, we take them out onto the range. If someone with dementia has played before, they can remember what to do. The enjoyment they get from hitting a golf ball is amazing. Carers have the option to play golf, relax inside with coffee and cake and have some time to themselves while we look after their relative for a couple of hours. It gives them a little bit of time for themselves and a little bit of a smile. Sometimes people just want someone to talk to, and so we just listen.

It is hard, but I find it hugely rewarding to give back to these people, even if it puts just one more smile on their face than they have had before.

Through this work I have made contacts with people across the country. I've become a bit of a font of knowledge about dementia. I have big dreams that the golfing community can unite behind this and that more golf clubs will become healthy ageing centres, giving up their course for just a couple of hours a month to help people with all sorts of disabilities.



# Magdalena's views

***"Ageing is a process that awaits all of us."***

A submission by the Polish Community Hub



## Ageing well in the Polish community

When we opened the Polish Community Hub for our vibrant Polish community, we knew our services would extend beyond the young. Our Polish community in Ipswich includes people of all ages, like Malgorzata's 60-year-old mother. It's a wonderful age but comes with its own needs and challenges; however, she is able to age with dignity through access to healthcare and technology in England.

For the wider Polish community, 'ageing well' means growing older with dignity and maintaining independence through access to healthcare, social engagement, and community support. While technology plays a key role, many older Polish individuals struggle with using digital platforms, so the support of community hubs is crucial. Respect, inclusion, and the ability to participate in both social and community life is essential for ageing well.

## Language barriers

There are several challenges older Polish residents in Ipswich face as they age, including language barriers and unfamiliarity with technology, which can make accessing community and healthcare services difficult. For instance, booking appointments or navigating English language platforms is often a struggle without support. The Polish Community Hub addresses this by offering free English lessons and assistance with communication.

Language barriers and limited English proficiency fuels social isolation among older Polish individuals because it makes tasks like buying bus tickets, using public transport, and participating in social activities harder. Thus, impacting their ability to travel independently, access services, and socialise with others. The Polish Community Hub aims to foster connections and provide a space for social interaction, counteracting this isolation.

## Respect & inclusion

Ensuring that older Polish individual feel respected and included in both the broader community and the Polish community is essential to their overall wellbeing, particularly given the challenges of ageing in a foreign country.

## Digital technology

The 21st century reliance on digital technology can be a barrier for older members of the Polish community. Many struggle with technology, making it harder to access services or communicate with others. The Polish Community Hub helps bridge this gap

> *"Our Polish community in Ipswich includes people of all ages, like Malgorzata's 60-year-old mother. It's a wonderful age but comes with its own needs and challenges; however, she is able to age with dignity through access to healthcare and technology in England."*

by offering support with digital platforms, through this remains a key challenge for those ageing in Suffolk.

Ultimately, while technological progress opens many doors to the modern world, the community hub's personal touch and ongoing support are vital to ensuring older Polish individuals can age with dignity and connection.

Nothing can replace the warmth of a conversation over a good cup of coffee.

# Joyce's views

***"Getting out and connecting with others is very important to me."***



## Outdoor spaces

I moved to Suffolk from Hertfordshire 18 months ago with my son. I'd lived in Watford for nearly 80 years, but we decided it was time for a change.

Living near the M25 and M1, we dealt with a lot of air pollution, so we wanted to move somewhere with cleaner air. We have visited Suffolk in the past for family holidays and knew what a nice county it was. I liked the idea of living near the sea again. When I was a child, my family lived in a seaside town on the south coast, and I have very fond memories of that time.

I also love to travel and see new places. My son has a camper van, and we often travel around the country. I try to make the most of my National Trust membership. Since moving to Suffolk, I've noticed a big difference in the air quality, and I find the food here much nicer, as so much of food is sprayed with chemicals these days. I also love the fact that there is easy access to the sea.

Some places and councils are so mean and make it difficult for people to get down to the coast and sit by the sea, but not here.

## Social participation

I feel really lucky that we have found such a nice place to live.

The people here are really friendly, and we have settled into the community quickly. I joined the Hollesley Welcome Club, which meets twice a month in the village hall. It's a great way to meet other members of the community over a cup of tea and a game of scrabble or bingo. They also organise coach trips to garden centres, and the theatre too.

> *"I know some members of the Welcome Club have difficulty with technology. I've heard there are lessons available to learn those skills, but they are several miles away and it's hard for people to get there."*

**Domain:**
Information and communication

The Meet Up sessions meet every Thursday in the village pub. When I celebrated my 100th birthday recently, they threw a little party for me, which was lovely. I also attend the church when I can. Getting out and connecting with others is very important to me.

## Transportation

Transport is an issue though. It's a long way to a bus stop. I rely on my son to take me to places. When he's not available, I use the local volunteer taxi service, which is fantastic. There are 12 volunteers, and someone is usually able to help.

## Digital technology

Although I have a mobile phone, my son helps me with accessing anything on the internet. I know some members of the Welcome Club have difficulty with technology. I've heard there are lessons available to learn those skills, but they are several miles away and it's hard for people to get there.

> *"I feel really fortunate that I have such good friends and neighbours. People who help me out when I need it."*



Joyce and Helen celebrated Joyce's 100th birthday at a local Meet Up event.

You can read Helen's views on ageing well from page 78 overleaf.

# Helen's views

***"I get a great deal of personal satisfaction from knowing that I am helping to address a need within the village."***



## Volunteering & employment

I'm 87 and still pretty active, as I have been throughout my life. I'm just made like that; I can't help it.

Helping people has always made me happy. I'm not one for just sitting around and chatting about nothing much. I want to be doing something worthwhile, so if I think there is a need, then I want to try help and find a solution. Over the years, I've contributed to my local community in various ways, and I get a great deal of personal satisfaction from knowing that I am helping to address a need within the village.

When my family was young and I wasn't able to work, I took up handloom weaving. Later, I learnt to do machine knitting and started to design my own things. At one point, I made 80 pairs of mitts and sold them to raise money to have solar panels installed on the village hall. In 2005, we had a village appraisal to identify what the local community needed. I said we needed better communication as we only had a little church newsletter that didn't say very much. So, we started 'Village Voices', and I was asked to be the first editor. I did that for 10 years. It started very humble, just 20 pages in black and white, and now it has grown to 40 pages all in colour. I am not on the editorial team now, but I do still contribute to two articles in each edition of the magazine.

I also served on the Parish Council for a few years, although I found it a bit frustrating because things didn't happen fast enough for my liking. However, it was during this time that I heard about Community Action Suffolk's Good Neighbourhood Scheme. I didn't think we needed it as this is a fairly safe community here, but what I did feel we needed was something to help people, so that's how we started Good Neighbours.

At first people didn't take us up on our offer to help, I don't think they really knew what to

> *"Helping people has always made me happy.*
>
> ***"I'm not one for just sitting around and chatting about nothing much."***

**Domain:**
Information and communication

*"I've lived in Suffolk for over 60 years and most of that time I've lived in Hollesley, and I have no plans to move because I love it here. I have a garden that I am letting re-wild, and I love to be able to sit there with a cup of coffee and enjoy the peace and quiet.*

***"We have got so much going on in the village too, so many things to be involved in, and while I am still able to contribute to my local community, I will do so."***

ask for or they didn't like to ask. So, we started Meet Up sessions every Thursday at the pub. This allowed us to connect more directly with people, especially those who were on their own, elderly, and lonely.

We learnt that what they needed most was transport, because although we have a demand responsive service here in Hollesley, it doesn't really do what people want it to do. We don't have a public bus service out here either, except one bus that goes into Ipswich at 07.30 in the morning and comes back at 6.00pm, and that's no good for elderly folk who want to go shopping in Woodbridge.

So, the Good Neighbours scheme organised a team of volunteer's drivers to help people get to medical appointments, the train station, or even just go shopping. We now have 12 volunteer drivers, and the system runs efficiently through a WhatsApp group.

## Development of new social groups

Currently, I'm working on trying to start a Men's Shed in the area. I noticed that it was mainly ladies coming to the various clubs and events we had in the villages, and I thought we need something specifically for men. There's still a lot to consider, but we've received some great advice from Community Action Suffolk and the Ambassador for Men's Sheds about how to get it going and what grants we can access.

## Digital challenges

Digital access is another real issue for some people, and I've been thinking we should offer some lessons. This could be something we incorporate alongside the Men's shed. A lot of people who come to the Meet Up sessions have a mobile but don't really have a clue what to do with it.

Several years ago, I went to some free classes in Woodbridge for retired people. It was enough to get me going on the basics, but I learnt most of my IT skills when I was working on the Village Voices magazine. I am probably more able than most of my contemporaries now, but it is important that once you've leant these skills to use them regularly.

When I learn something new, and I come to it a week or two later I have to think 'now how do I do that?' As you age you don't take in information in the same way, and it is a case of 'use it or lose it'.  This might be where the Men's Shed could help by supporting people to access things online and even to help people learn those IT skills.

# T's views

***"I have spent my whole life working and it has come down to this. I am a widow with nothing. It's very difficult."***



## Lack of facilities

I live just outside of Bury St Edmunds. We have nothing here. Nothing. No community centre, no shops, no doctors, no dentist, no facilities at all. We have nowhere to go and socialise.

They are building a leisure centre on the estate but it's going to be very expensive. People of my age that rely on their pension to live will certainly not be able to afford to use those facilities unless the company is going to give residents or OAPs discounts.

We used to have a convenience store, and it was a nice walk from my house but that has now been shut for over a year. To get a magazine or toothpaste you must go into town. We need a proper shop where you can get an actual week's shopping and not one of those small shops that costs twice as much.

We don't even have a proper bus service. I must call up this bus company, wait for it to be available and then walk to a meeting point. I might have to wait an hour depending on the time, and it is often expensive. Moving is not an option for me.

## Social life

I get to see my son on a Sunday, but I hardly see anybody. On this estate, there are only a couple of OAPs and the rest go to work, so I don't see many people. I don't have friends, or company because, for years, I lived abroad; but when my spouse passed away I just couldn't cope being there on my own, so I had to move back.

I have spent my whole life working and it has come down to this - a widow with nothing. It's very difficult. I am on anti-depressants and painkillers from the GP. Being lonely and excluded is the reason behind my depression.

## Making new connections - an update following participation

Participating in this research has helped T to make new connections through signposting by Healthwatch Suffolk. T said:

> *"I reached out to the befriending scheme as suggested by the Healthwatch Suffolk team, and they got back in touch with information about a mobile library in Bury St Edmunds town centre, suggesting I should check it out.*
>
> *"I went along and I met a woman who's a bit younger than me, but we've since become friends. I'm glad to have made at least one new friend since we spoke, and we're even meeting up for a coffee tomorrow."*

# Being social

# The Happy Circle Club

## *A note from Brian (group member)*



I'm a member of the Oulton Happy Circle which is a club for elderly citizens in the Oulton Broad area and it has been running for around 40 years.

Nearly all our 24 members are in their 80s, including myself at 86. We enjoy coming together every Tuesday afternoon at the Oulton Community Centre.

Transport to and from our meetings is provided by friends and a wonderful community transport service at a low cost. Our club offers a warm welcome to members, and this is followed by games of cards, bingo, coffee and biscuits all at a nominal cost.

We used to provide trips to local attractions such as the end of the pier show at Cromer and other local events, but the rising cost of coach hire has made this impossible. We are now concentrating on having lunches, some provided at our meeting place and some very close to it where community transport can and does take and bring members to the event.

We pride ourselves in that our contacts are not only with weekly meetings but at other times where members need help and support.



# Being social

# Hadleigh Movers

## *A note from Karen (Dance artist and lead of Hadleigh Movers classes)*



I'm a professional Dance Artist and lead the Hadleigh Movers classes.

These are fun, social, and engaging classes for anyone who identifies as an older adult or feels the class would benefit their physical and mental wellbeing. Each session provides a wonderful mix of dance, laugher and a cup of tea. They are designed to help boost your fitness, give you a chance to socialise and connect with others, but most importantly, to have fun!

The classes are suitable for all levels of mobility, and no dance experience is needed. There are both seated and standing options throughout.

Below is a summary of comments from our group members to show how these classes are supporting them to age well.

The Hadleigh Movers classes are highly valued for both its physical and mental benefits. Members report relief from discomfort, such as arthritis and a boost in mood, with others noting improvements in posture, balance, and overall body flow.

The classes not only promotes better physical health but also support mental wellbeing through social interactions and allowing people to make new friends.

Many find the combination of dance and exercise to be fulfilling, providing a great sense of achievement. Some members even expressed they wish they had discovered the classes sooner.

*"I have arthritis in my knees and hips, coming to class makes me forget about the discomfort I feel and cheers me up."*

*"My body flows better and gives one a happy vibe. I absolutely love it."*

*"Better posture and balance has improved."*

*"The class not only helps with physical health but mental health too. Meeting new people and chatting too."*

*"The whole concept of the classes give a great sense of achievement from both exercise and dance aspects."*

*"I wish I'd found the classes sooner."*

# Chris's views

***"This is my opportunity to give back, but it also benefits me as it's keeping my brain functioning & helps me to stay healthy."***



## Community Participation

I'm 72, but I don't feel my age. I feel younger than that. Since retiring seven years ago, I've always had a strong desire to give back to the community because I took so much when I was working. I'm the Parish Chairman for my village and the treasurer for the Moving Well Project in Debenham. This is my opportunity to give back, but it also benefits me because it's keeping my brain functioning and helps me to stay healthy.

I've been involved in the Moving Well Project since it started in 2022. It was originally set up and funded by the local health commissioning group, offering a six-week course focused on health, wellbeing, and mindfulness. It was later taken over by Communities Together East Anglia, but eventually, they said the group would have to close unless someone else could keep it going. There was a real desire that people wanted it to continue.

It was an opportunity for me to do something for the community over and above what I was already doing, so I agreed to take it on. I wrote a business plan and applied for some funding from the local council, as I couldn't see how we could keep the group running and costs of participation low, without some external help.

The focus of the group remains the same

> ***"Mobility, above everything else, is key to being able to function in a rural community.***
>
> *"Mobility is not just about being able to drive a car. It's about being able to walk around your home, to do everyday tasks like peeling a potato. It's a word that is too lightly used and under-described by too many people. I've seen first-hand how, when a person's mobility starts to deteriorate, the loneliness starts to creep in."*

# S's views

***"People don't understand how difficult it is... I hope that I will have friends to help but it's not always convenient. It all adds to the worry and feeling of isolation."***



## Transportation

Transport is a big concern for me. I live in a small town with about 6,000 people. We have a few shops, but if you can't walk far, getting around is tough. We have some community activities, but some people can't find anything they want to go because they prefer something more stimulating than bingo.

While the community transport service is helpful, it's expensive – around £7 for a return trip to a slightly bigger supermarket. This adds a lot to the cost of shopping, and not everyone can afford it. You are supposed to book the bus two weeks in advance, so you can't be spontaneous. The service doesn't accept bus passes and local taxis are limited.

Not everyone has access to a car, and even though I still drive, I worry about what will happen when I can't anymore. Public transport is limited and there are no buses in the evening or on Sundays and bank holidays. People who want to go to events such as fêtes, that often happen on these days, can't access them.

A trip to the hospital can take an entire day on public transport just for a half hour appointment. People don't understand how difficult it is, and this is what worries people as they get older. I hope that I will have friends around me to help but it's not always convenient for them. It all adds to the worry and feeling of isolation.

My 90-year-old mum used to rely on the buses but now depends on me for shopping. She used online deliveries, but the driver leaves the groceries at the door, and she can't manage them on her own anymore. It's a challenge for many elderly people, especially with more services moving online.

*"My 90-year-old mum used to rely on the buses but now depends on me for shopping. She used online deliveries, but the driver leaves the groceries at the door, and she can't manage them on her own anymore. It's a challenge for many elderly people, especially with more services moving online."*

Not being able to use digital communication and no access to transport increases isolation and affects wellbeing. I have often thought a shuttle bus around the area, running all day and into the evening, would help both locals and tourists. It would connect to train services, making travel easier. Norfolk has something similar, but we don't have anything like it here.

## Housing

My friends and I, all in our 60s, have talked about what happens when we can't drive anymore. Some of us consider moving to bigger towns, but it's not always affordable, and moving means leaving behind friends and support networks. There also isn't enough suitable housing for older people who want to downsize before managing a larger home becomes overwhelming. There are small social housing bungalows locally, but I wouldn't meet the criteria.

It is about getting people to think more creatively about what older people want or need and what will benefit wider society. It feels like there are so many missed opportunities in transport and housing that could make life easier as we age.

# J's views

***"Even volunteering or maintaining a sense of independence by going shopping becomes impossible without reliable transport. If they stop free bus passes, it would be devastating."***



## Respect and Inclusion

I've noticed a growing lack of respect and understanding between young and older people. It seems like older members of our community aren't valued the way they used to be.

This happens because where young and old people used to mix, like youth clubs, church groups have all disappeared. These groups provide role models, a guiding hand and advice, but now that engagement between young and old just isn't happening. This impacts on older people as they feel less involved in their community.

I think it might help to create opportunities for young and old people to work alongside each other through apprenticeship schemes.

## Transportation

Transport is a real issue, especially in rural areas where there is no public transport because the bus services have been cut back. So, older people who don't drive have to rely on charities and small organisations that operate on year-to-year funding.

Bus companies use big buses and say its no longer viable to run, but why not run a mini-bus services instead? I think the lack of public transport impacts on lots of elderly people and whose who are economically challenged and can't afford to drive or get to job. Cuts to these services penalise older people. If you are older and lonely and rely on a bus service to get to a lunch club or into town, you just don't go.

I live in a fairly rural area myself, and while our bus service has been cut, we still have one that comes through the village every hour. My 92-year-old father though, lives in a more remote area. He's computer literate and helps others with their computer. But if he couldn't help, they'd have to travel 26 miles round trip to Woodbridge library. I'm not even sure if the library provides support to help people use the computer.

I support an older gentleman who is alone, and I showed him how to use the computer to enable him to pick up his emails from America. So, if you don't have a computer getting to libraries is essential for older people to retain contact with their families living away, but they have to be able to get there.

## Domains interconnect

So many things rely on so many other things. We can focus on transport because if older people can't get out and access essential services, it becomes a real problem as they

lose social contacts. Although, we have team meetings so if you're looking after a spouse with severe dementia, you could be offered a telephone or online carer support meeting, but sometimes you need to physically get out of the house for respite.

But if there's no transport, you can't do it. That impacts terribly on people's health. If you are lonely and want to go to the shops and have a coffee and end up talking to somebody you need to be able to do that. Even volunteering or maintaining a sense of independence by going shopping becomes impossible without reliable transport.

If they stop free bus passes, it would be devastating. For many older people, the bus pass is a way to get out and meet people. If they had to pay for that, it might become economically impossible.

# Paul's views

***"Right now, we only drive within a 15-mile radius but losing the car would make life a nightmare. Even getting to the train station requires the car."***



## Access to healthcare & digital

I am 73 years old, with heart failure, COPD, and a failing hip joint. I underwent open heart surgery 12 years ago which failed so I now have a leaking valve meaning my heart doesn't function like it should. My hip can't be operated on due to my heart problems and the effects of general anaesthetic.

So, one of my worries is it is such a rigmarole getting an appointment with the doctor. We have to ring the surgery which can take a long time. It used to have an internet system, but they stopped it. The last few times we have tried to use the app it was not available.

## Transportation

At the moment we have a car, but it's 21 years old and the odds of us being able to buy another one is minimal. If it fails the MOT, replacing it isn't an option. We used to have a bus service in Hesset, but it's gone now. The nearest bus is two miles away in Thurston, but I can't walk that far due to my health.

I do have a bus pass, and I can get a bus if I book it several weeks in advance, but I was unaware of the taxi vouchers I would be entitled to. We also have a blue badge that we use to go into town, but getting to the GP surgery in Woolpit, four miles away, is difficult.

Without a car we would have to pre-plan everything. At the moment if we need something we just go down the road to get it, but we would have to pre-plan everything. It would affect me mentally as even now I have to have a medical every two years to keep my license. My wife can drive, but her health isn't great either. Right now, we only drive within a 10–15-mile radius but losing the car would make life a nightmare. Even getting to the train station, four miles away requires the car.

## Social participation and digital

During lockdown, we used to do online shopping, but it costs more as we could only choose what was online and can't browse. Being on a tight budget we shop at the cheaper shops and don't do it online now.

We used to go out on a Friday to a club for three to four hours, but we gave that up as neither of our health is up to it and the drive is too much. There are social events in the village hall like tea afternoons which we attend because they are just up the road. As well as shopping and getting to see our grandchildren.

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You can find it at **https://www.agewithoutlimits.org/image-library**.

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