

A photograph of two elderly men walking away from the camera on a winding stone path in a lush, green garden. The man on the left is wearing a light-colored sweater and dark trousers, while the man on the right is wearing a striped polo shirt and blue jeans. The garden is filled with various plants, including large green leafy plants in the foreground and dense trees and shrubs in the background.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE: *Uncovered*

Our Ageing Population

Shining a spotlight on our county of contrast

 *Heart of Bucks*
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Introduction

Older people in Buckinghamshire play an intrinsic, vibrant, and pivotal role across our county. This report will uncover statistics relating to our older population in Buckinghamshire, how this compares to national data, what the future challenges may be, and showcase opportunities within our communities that empower the lives of our older population. We will also share different perspectives from around the county, as we build a picture of the ageing population in our community.

To support the community efficiently in terms of policy and action, we need to understand the hidden challenges as well as the provisions already in place. As part of this process we need to consider local demographic composition. This will provide a thorough presentation of the county's resident trends. With this information, the community needs can be better understood with more specific and effective actions to improve the quality of life for people in Buckinghamshire put in place.

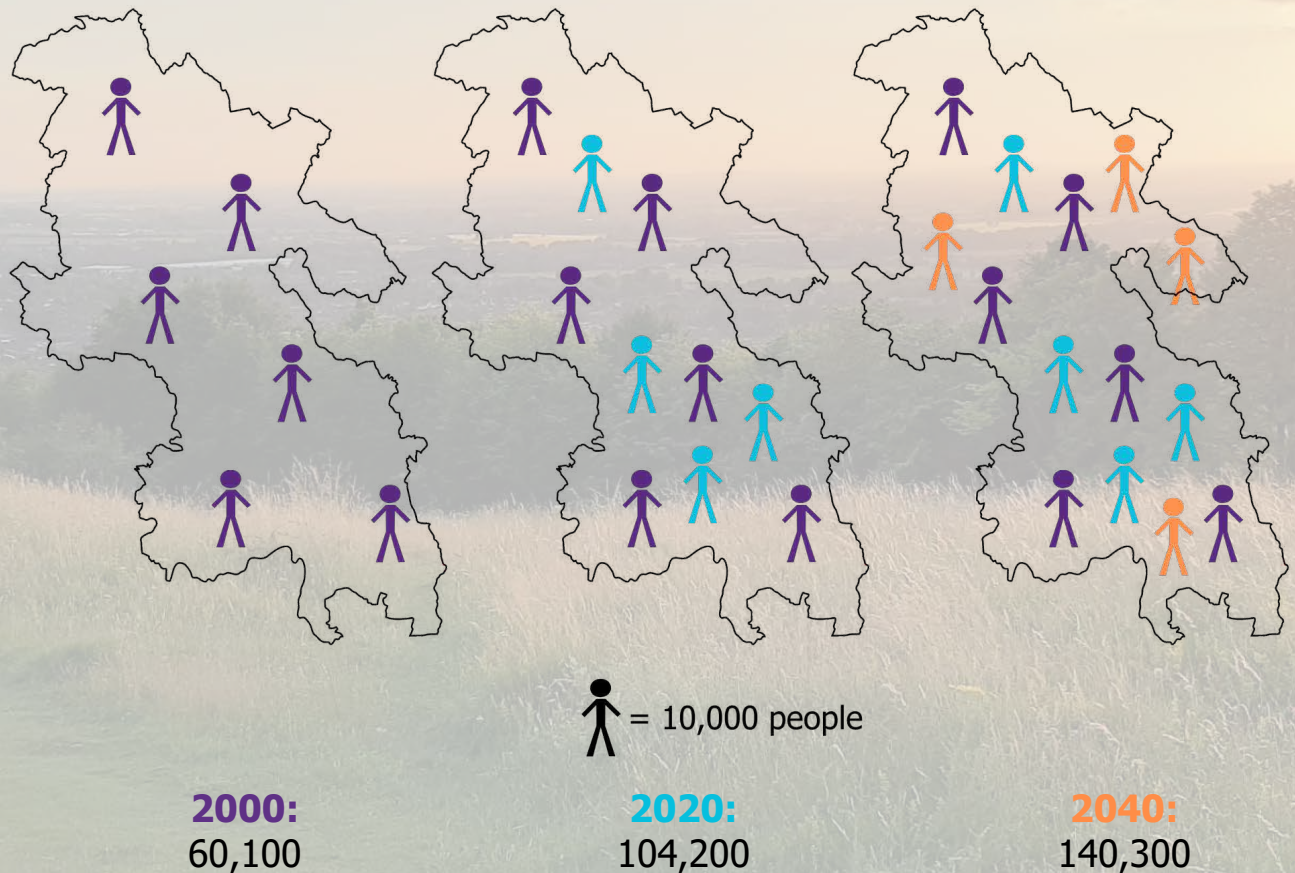


The data

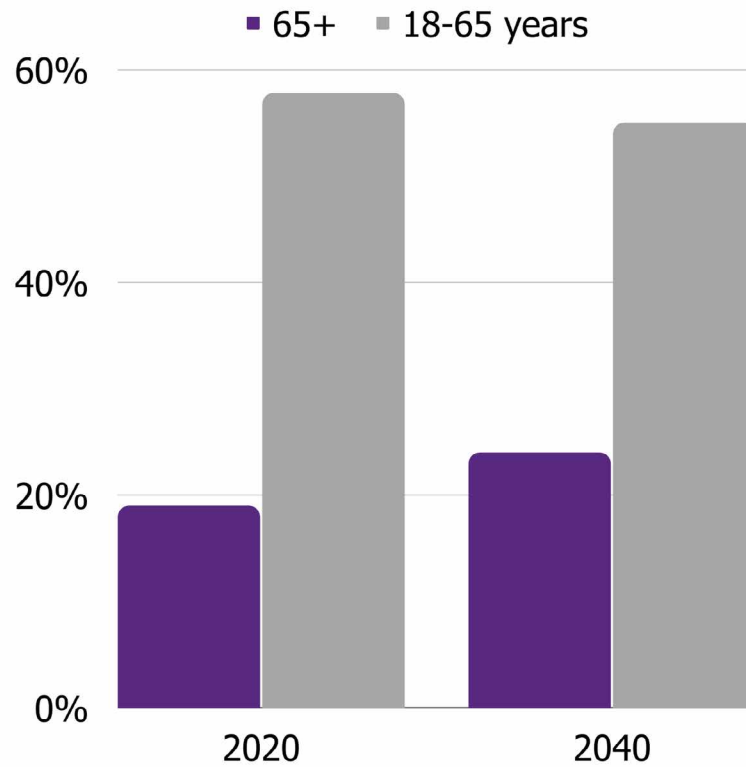
The population in Buckinghamshire has increased by 9.6% from 2011 to 2021, which is higher than the national average of 6.6%. Our older population is growing even faster.^[1]

The data available, obtained from the Bucks Data Exchange, illustrates population trends and projections showing a significant increase for those aged 65 years and above, compared with a steady plateau for people aged 16–64 years.

Older population figures (65+)



Predicted population change

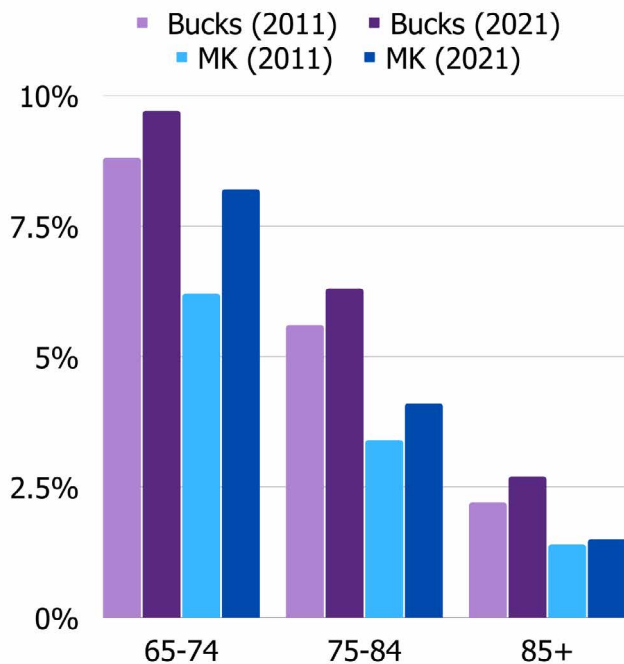
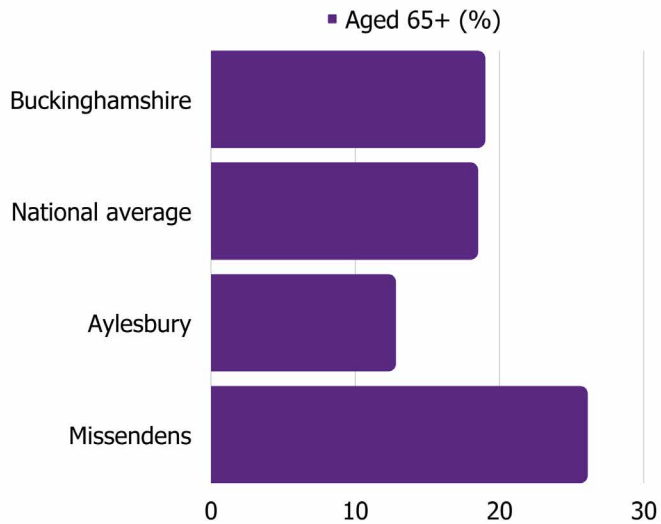


Currently, those aged 65 years and above make up 19% of the population in Buckinghamshire and 57.8% are aged between 18-64 years. This is forecast to shift over the next 20 years; in 2040 it is predicted that 24% of the population will be 65 years and above and only 55% will be aged between 18-64. As result, the Old Age Dependency Ratio (OADR) is projected to almost double from 22.6 in 2001 to 44.6 in 2040.^[2]



What is the OADR?

The OADR is the ratio of older people aged 65+ compared to the working-age population (16-64). The data is relevant to the proportion of dependants per 100 working-age people. A higher ratio will ultimately lead to a change in how the needs of older people can be met.



As a county, we have a higher than average population of older people (65 years and above) at 19% compared with the national average of 18.5%. However, if we take a closer look at age composition at community board level, 12.8% of the population in Aylesbury are 65 years and above, with 21.9% under 16 years of age. If we compare this with the Missendens, 26.1% of the population are 65 years and above and only 18.6% under 16 years of age. This will undoubtedly have an effect on the local OADR and result in differing needs across the county. The data highlights potential future challenges and opportunities for the community of Buckinghamshire in terms of care needs and workforce changes. Older people already play a vital role in our communities, local economy and workforce, and this will continue to increase significantly as the demographics shift in future years. [3]

Comparison with Milton Keynes

Exploring the different age categories the data shows that all older age ranges have increased from 2011 to 2021. When Buckinghamshire is compared to our neighbouring local authority of Milton Keynes, it becomes clear that Bucks may have different requirements as a locality, with a larger elderly population, particularly those aged over 85. The same analysis applies when comparing age percentages for Buckinghamshire to the national average. [4]

Life expectancy disparities

Community Boards:

It is clear that our people are living longer in Buckinghamshire. On average, our residents have an extended life expectancy compared with the national average of 79 years for males and 82.9 years for females. However, these averages hide disparities even at community board level within Buckinghamshire.^[5]

Male life expectancy for Buckinghamshire is 81.5. Yet, when this is compared to two contrasting community board areas such as Aylesbury (79.7) and Haddenham and Waddesdon (82.2), it becomes evident that there are variances in life expectancy at local and hyper-local level and indicates that there are higher proportions of older people in certain parts of the county.

The same trend occurs for female life expectancy. The female life expectancy across Buckinghamshire is 85.1 but when we take a closer look at the same two community board areas, Aylesbury is below the county average at 82.9 and Haddenham and Waddesdon is above the county average at 86.2.^[6]

Ward Level:

A male living in
Southcourt will live

4.3 years less

than the average male in Buckinghamshire

and

8.4 years less

than a male
living in Marlow.

For females, the differences
are even greater.

A female living in
Gatehouse will live

5.4 years less

than the average female in Bucks

and

12.6 years less

than a female
living in Marlow.^[7]

Analysis

As a county, we need to explore the challenges and opportunities which communities throughout Buckinghamshire may encounter as a result of a larger ageing population. The data confirms the need for a better understanding around why life expectancy is varied and how we can tailor differing needs of our communities with a higher percentage of older residents. We want to assist in the development of effective policies and future considerations that build an age-friendly Bucks.

**People can experience a variety of challenges as they grow older.
It is important that the community is adequately equipped to deal with:**

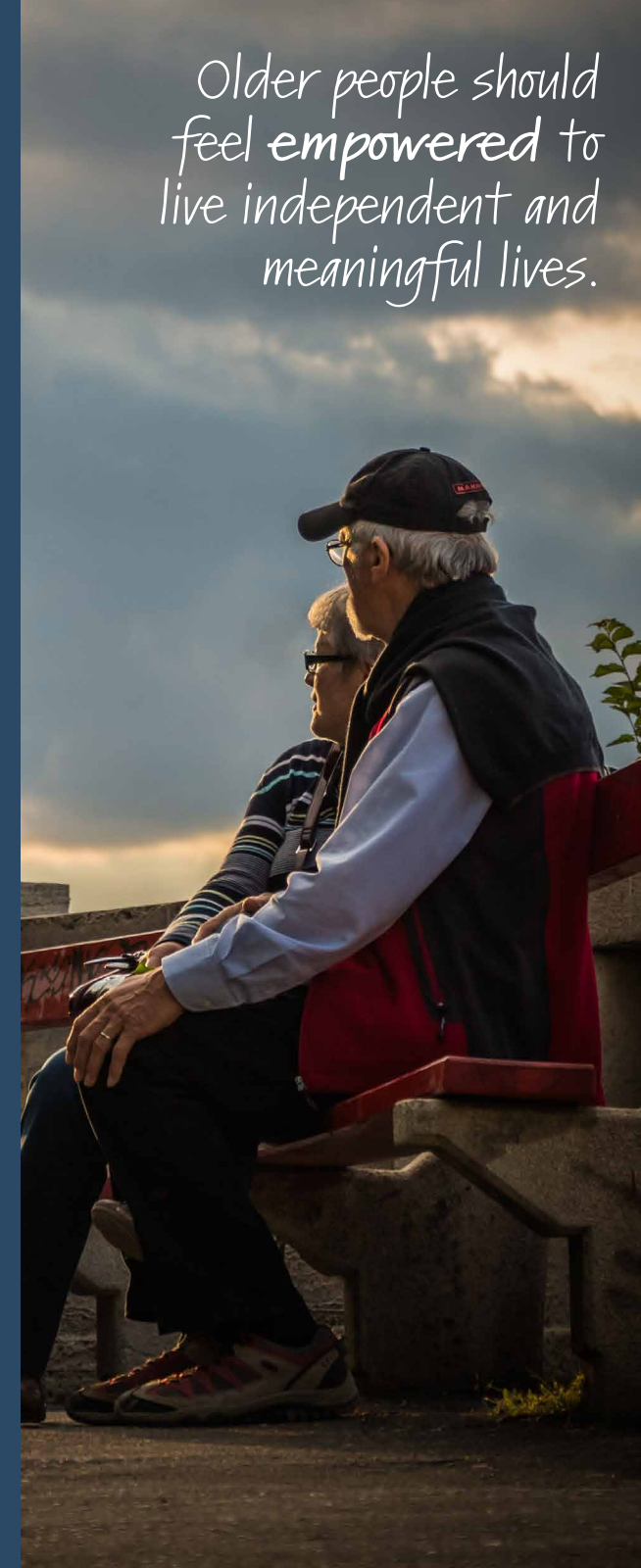
Reduced physical activity levels

Increased loneliness and disconnection from the community

Lesser rates of workforce involvement

Issues concerning accessibility and health inequalities

Older people should feel empowered to live independent and meaningful lives.



It is important to recognise that wider determinants of health are all interconnected and need to be addressed as part of a system-wide approach to healthy ageing. To achieve 'healthy ageing' the concept of an age-friendly community needs to be defined. Creating an age-friendly community is a core aim of the Council's 'Health and Wellbeing Strategy'. It may involve designing and creating policies that develop appropriate housing to reduce risk of falls and injuries, the quality of the surrounding environment and infrastructure to ensure maintenance of independence, and ensuring community life is inclusive regarding the social activities on offer to reduce isolation and achieve longer years of healthy life expectancy.

In the context of the 'Opportunity Bucks' programme run by Buckinghamshire Council, the data highlights that growing older may not be an equal experience, given the disparities depending on geographic location within the county. This is illustrated by the differences between life and healthy life expectancy and should be recognised as a concern when considering action points for Buckinghamshire's ten most deprived ward areas.^[8]

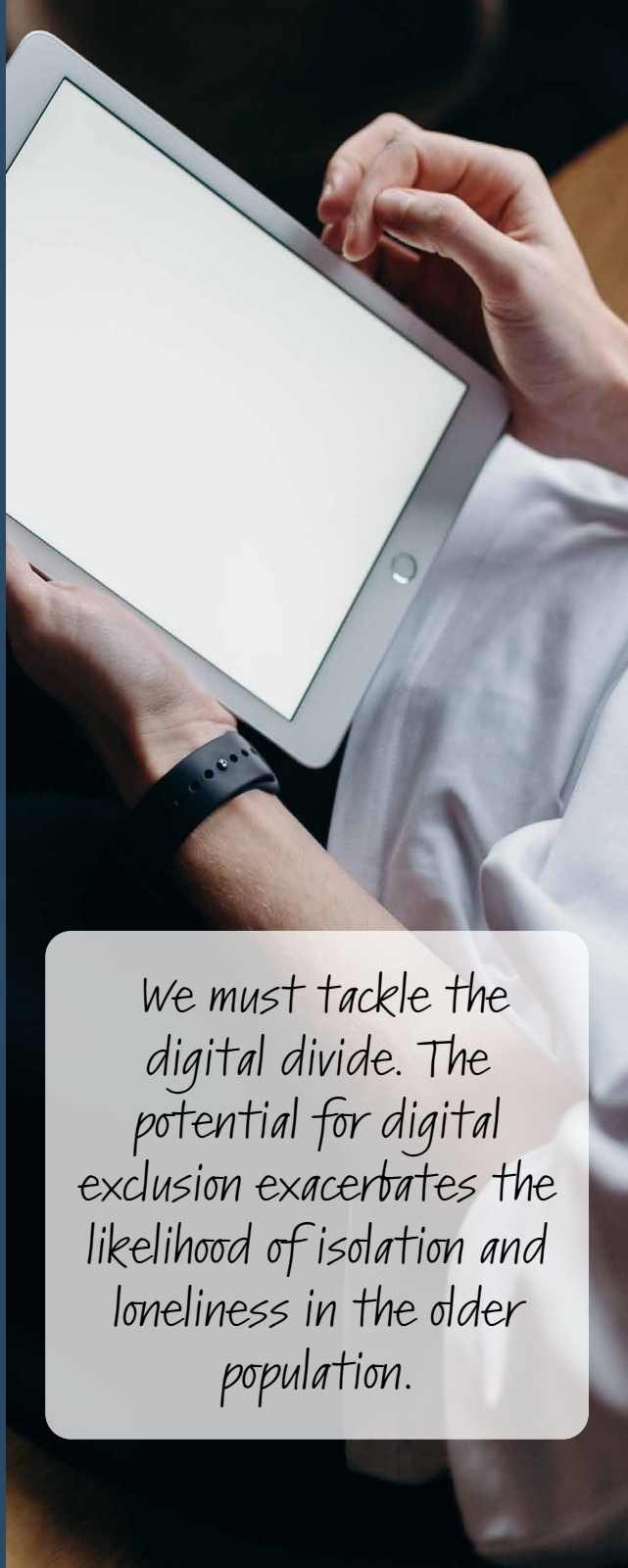
For Buckinghamshire an imperative challenge to consider is the rural aspect of the county and how this poses increased threats of isolation for older people if infrastructure and transport links are not adequate. It has been stated in the 2018 'Healthy Places, Healthy Future' Director of Public Health report^[8], that strong and thriving communities are comprised of opportunities to participate in social interaction, particularly for disadvantaged groups.



In order for Buckinghamshire to not only be an age-friendly, but thriving and inclusive community where older people have the highest possible levels of freedom, agency, and empowerment, there should be significant effort towards promoting ways to keep rural areas connected through infrastructure, and importantly, digital means.

Many barriers have been discussed by various groups and stakeholders with a general agreement around the need for digital inclusion to ensure older people can access healthcare, online forms and have opportunities to stay connected to the wider community. Improvements in this area will also have a positive impact on older people living alone; the likelihood of lone living increases to 28.4% in Buckinghamshire when 65 and over. The challenge of connecting older people who live alone in Bucks could be more demanding since a high proportion of homes in Buckinghamshire (5.4%) are lived in by a single adult over 65 (national average: 5.2%).^[9]

The pressure on local health and social care services from a rising elderly population is an additional challenge to consider. This comes as a result of increases in risk of falls, decreased mobility, general health deterioration and more dependence on care services being required. The Department of Health^[10] also estimates that the average cost of providing hospital and community health services for a person aged 85 years or more is around three times greater than for a person aged 65 to 74 years.

A close-up photograph of a person wearing a white lab coat, holding a tablet computer. The person's hands are visible, and they appear to be interacting with the device. The background is dark and out of focus.

We must tackle the digital divide. The potential for digital exclusion exacerbates the likelihood of isolation and loneliness in the older population.

A projected 35% increase in our older population escalates these challenges. This illustrates the need for adequate health services as a priority in order to manage future demand. To ensure this demand is met within the community, there will need to be suitable staffing levels within the healthcare sector so that our older population can experience healthy ageing. This challenge is intensified when considering the changing age composition of the county over the next 20 years along with the projected OADR. With a predicted plateau of working age populations compared with a significant increase in older populations, older people must be at the centre of local plans to develop the future workforce.

The largest number of job postings in the county were for Care Workers and Nurses. There is a similar trend across the South East. However, the workforce profile within Buckinghamshire does not match the necessary skills and job profiles required to meet the needs of our ageing population. Despite the top two job postings relating to care and nurses, only 8% of people living in Buckinghamshire are employed within a caring or service occupation.^[11]

Ultimately, a helpful strategic approach, looking at the full experience of growing older, should focus on how to empower all adults (including those aged 40-60) with ideas and support to manage the ageing process positively and actively.





“Having worked in the care sector most of my 30 year career I am a passionate advocate in support of creating the right services to support our elderly community. It is one of the reasons why I work with Heart of Bucks as we share the same values, that every person deserves the right to live a healthy, fulfilled and happy life. And it is our duty as a society to put the right help in place. Enabling the aging population to stay at home with just the right amount of support to meet the medical and physical needs that become more challenging as you age, takes pressure off health services, and is my main driver.

“Recruitment is certainly a challenge in the health and care sector right now which is why it is important to publicise the opportunities and rewards a career supporting our ageing population can bring. There are many part time or flexible roles available directly in everyone’s own communities. And it is proven that maintaining a sense of independence and ownership as you advance into older age keeps you happy. Planning is crucial and I always encourage everyone to have what might seem like difficult conversation sooner rather than later, before there is a fall or a hospital visit, and then you can explore options and make informed decisions. It may just be outsourcing small tasks that are becoming harder, like gardening or ironing, that help and simultaneously reduce the risk of falls or injuries which would require hospital and doctor visits. Being as independent and functional as possible is vital.”

“Being as independent and functional as possible is vital”

Trudi Scrivener

Heart of Bucks Ambassador for Physical & Mental Health, Wellbeing & Safety

Opportunities

Despite the evident challenges that people can face as they grow older, and the more specific challenges for Buckinghamshire residents, we celebrate the significant role that older people play in the community, in the workforce, and society at large. To enhance and grow this contribution, there are various ongoing projects and opportunities aimed at creating an age-friendly environment and improving the experience of ageing in our community.

There is a collaborative effort across the county to tackle barriers and promote inclusion for the older population with services not exhaustive of befriending, intergenerational activities and the Healthy Ageing Collaborative. The most relevant resources to find what is available in differing community areas are located on the Bucks Online Directory, Buckinghamshire Council, the Community Impact Bucks website, and Bucks Older People's Action Group^[12,13,14]. These resources set out the opportunities for local community organisations to engage with older residents in various ways to encourage physical activity, learn new skills and provide the prospect of social and creative events.



The new Integrated Care Strategy and the Buckinghamshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy both share a core objective and focus to help our communities 'Age Well', through concepts like 'healthy' and 'active' ageing. This can be achieved by improving physical activity provision and reducing social isolation.

The new Frailty Strategy for Bucks^[15] focuses on prevention, early identification of health needs and improving the urgent community care available. This pro-active approach, alongside greater collaboration between primary, community, acute and social care, will support frail and elderly people to live independently for longer and receive treatment more quickly in the most appropriate location and by the most appropriate health professionals.

The new Frailty Strategy for Bucks will:

- Improve NHS care in Care Homes
- Identify and provide proactive support to old people living with frailty in the community
- Enhance rapid community response at times of crisis



Case study: Healthy Ageing Collaborative

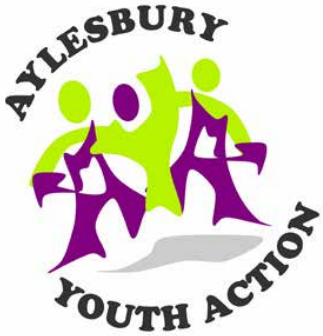
The Healthy Ageing Collaborative (HAC) is a new and local concept, driven by the Public Health team at Buckinghamshire Council, which aims to improve the emotional, cognitive and mental wellbeing of older people. It has established a collaborative network of partners with the intention that this will provide opportunities to share resources, insights and experience between the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector. The aim is to deliver local projects and evaluate impact that will achieve improved social connectedness and reduce loneliness and isolation amongst the older population of Buckinghamshire.

Statement from Mark Russell, Co-Chair of HAC

We want all older people in Bucks to have the chance to love later life, which means understanding their needs and sharing all the wonderful things that come with older age, as well as supporting them and their families with the challenges too. Older people make up such a significant part of our workforce, our carers, our volunteers and our communities... that we can't afford not to.

As Bucks's population continues to shift to an older profile, it is more important than ever to ensure older people's voices are heard and taken account of. We know too well that through social conditioning, social isolation, digital exclusion, or reluctance to make a fuss, older people's voices can go unspoken or unheard, and this must change.





Case study: Aylesbury Youth Action: Generate Project

Generate at Aylesbury Youth Action (AYA) is a great example of work that is being done on the ground within Bucks to help improve the lives of our older population.

Generate is an intergenerational project coordinated by AYA which involved young volunteers interacting with older people in care homes. By enabling both young and old to create relationships, it has helped to reduce the growing problem of loneliness and isolation amongst our older population. Generate also offered other benefits such as respite for staff within the care homes, allowing them to focus on other necessary areas of work.

The project ran during the Covid-19 pandemic and out of this was the formation of 'Memory Boxes'. These boxes were designed by volunteers remotely and delivered to care homes to help trigger the five senses and mimic 'a trip down memory lane'. These person-centred care techniques – demonstrated at AYA – have been proven to result in fewer neuropsychiatric symptoms and welcoming the reduction in care management costs. Overall, the social interaction and unlocking of memories is a vital tool in helping to combat effects of dementia and loneliness. This project had a wide range of advantages not only for the older people and members of staff, but also for the young people involved.

A young person who was part of the project said:

"I think it's really good. It's going to benefit you and help you feel more confident, and people in care homes get lonely as they don't really get to talk to people, so it's good to feel like you're doing something for the community."

Systems leadership

It is important to recognise the two current and prominent local strategies have an emphasis on discourse and activity that encourages an 'age well' approach. To fulfil the joint Health and Wellbeing strategy commitment to become more age friendly, Buckinghamshire Council and partners are also developing a 'Healthy Ageing Strategy'.

Integrated Care Partnership strategy 2023^[16]:

"Isolation and loneliness increase the risk of poor health, including increasing the risk of anxiety and depression. Six per cent of people aged 75 and over say they often or always feel lonely. People with a limiting long-term illness or disability are more likely to say they often feel lonely."

Buckinghamshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-25^[17]:

"61% of people in England aged 55-74 are active, this falls to 39% in those aged 75+ (2020/21)."

Our future considerations align with the most recently published Integrated Care Partnership strategy 2023 and the Buckinghamshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-25. The combined focus areas of the strategies are aimed at supporting the physical health of our older generation whilst improving places and digital access to sustain community connectedness and reduce social isolation. At Heart of Bucks we will echo these themes when it comes to policy recommendations to build an age-friendly future.



Our future considerations

Health

Policies aimed at improving preventative healthcare which assist our population to remain active and healthy in later life. This could help increase the proportion of life spent in good health and reduce costs as a result of falls and injuries. This will also enable our older population to be more active, participate in and shape places in which they live.

Energy

It is evident that older age groups will experience the largest impact regarding their disposable incomes due to rising energy costs compared to any other age group. For future, policies need to consider our elderly population at the highest priority when contemplating energy efficiency to make sure the impact is lessened.

Community Cohesion

Aim to understand the infrastructure of Buckinghamshire including, open/public places, transport links and safety precautions to build and upgrade our county to an age-friendly community. This will ensure our older generations are well connected, reduce isolation and loneliness and create further independence.





Inequality

A multi-agency strategy is needed to coordinate government actions and funding to address the ageing population of Buckinghamshire and reduce the gaps of growing inequality in the way we experience later life.



Workplace

The creation of age-friendly workplaces that give our older generation the opportunity to live longer, healthier, working lives.



Housing

Regulations around building standards need to be developed to ensure all new homes are 'fit for the future'. Plans must highlight the need for well insulated, accessible and adaptable homes, both for existing and new homes.



Discourse and language

The framing and narrative regarding growing old should always strive to be free from stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.^[18]

Final thoughts

“

At Age UK Buckinghamshire we are delighted that Heart of Bucks have chosen to shine a much needed light on the challenges and opportunities of older age in our county. While we inhabit a complex and challenging world and local scene, with the cost of living exacerbating inequalities and driving more hardship, we must ensure we continue to work to support all our older people with the challenges they face and the opportunities they have, and at the same time help to reframe the narrative about older people, so we can all look forward with optimism to fulfilling our older age with purpose and vigour.

”



Mark Russell

CEO at Age UK Buckinghamshire

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References

- [1] <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E06000060/>
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