

Ageing Well in Suffolk

Suffolk Annual Public Health Report 2024



Dear reader,



Stuart Keeble:
Director of Public Health

Ageing well challenges the conventional narrative of a 'typical' older person. While age is often seen as just a number, it represents far more—a complex and diverse journey shaped by individual experiences, needs, and aspirations. Adopting a holistic perspective on ageing allows us to celebrate this diversity and respond meaningfully to the opportunities and challenges it presents.

Traditionally, we've viewed ageing through a narrow lens, particularly in the public sector, where age thresholds like 65 or 75 are used as benchmarks. Yet, as I get closer to retirement—likely at 67—I'm reminded that ageing isn't merely a point on a timeline. It's a deeply personal process influenced by our health, behaviours, and the environments in which we live. It's not as simple as saying, "At 76, you're old."

To meet the needs of our ageing population, we must move beyond outdated stereotypes and shift the narrative. It's essential to address the wide-ranging experiences of older adults and create a Suffolk that is truly age-friendly, where healthy ageing is actively supported and celebrated. This aligns with our Public Health and Communities ambition to promote ageing well across the county.

The importance of this work is underscored by the 2023 annual report from England's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Sir Chris Whitty, which focused on health in an ageing society. The report not only highlighted the spectrum of healthy ageing but also recognised [Suffolk](#) as a key area where the population is ageing rapidly. At a recent East of England event, he noted that Suffolk and Norfolk have some of the fastest-ageing populations in the region. In fact, Suffolk's older population is proportionally larger than many [European countries](#). By 2023, nearly a quarter (24%) of Suffolk residents were aged 65 or older, compared to just 19% two decades earlier. Between [2002 and 2022](#), Suffolk's overall population grew by 14%, while the population aged 65 and over increased by 48%.

This is, in many ways, a success story—people are living longer thanks to improved living conditions, advances in healthcare, and healthier behaviours. However, longer lives also bring increased risks of long-term health conditions, as well as challenges like loneliness, social isolation, and loss of independence. While life expectancy in Suffolk is in the early 80s, healthy life expectancy stalls in the mid-60s, leaving over a decade of declining health that we must work to improve.

Ageing well is intricately tied to inequalities. In some communities, health disparities mean that the effects of ageing begin 20 years earlier than in others. [National research](#) highlights that individuals in their 50s and early 60s—particularly those affected by the cost-of-living crisis, low pay, or unemployment due to ill health, disability, or caring responsibilities—require targeted support. Addressing these disparities is essential to ensure everyone can age with dignity, health, and wellbeing. It also highlights the importance of earlier intervention, starting around age 50, to reduce the need for intensive care and support later in life.

These challenges also bring opportunities for prevention. By promoting social connections, inclusion, and proactive measures, we can delay the onset of ill health and enhance the quality of later life. While healthcare often focuses—rightly—on critical aspects of ageing such as falls and frailty, this report takes a broader view. This report is deliberately and unapologetically broad in its scope, recognising that there isn't a single solution or a narrow set of actions to accommodate our ageing population—only a multifaceted, inclusive approach can truly meet the diverse needs and aspirations of our residents. We are witnessing a profound demographic shift, and minor adjustments to our existing systems and approaches will no longer suffice. We must take a solutions focused approach, and fundamentally rethink how we support our ageing population to ensure they can thrive in their communities.

Creating age-friendly environments is central to this mission. Such environments allow individuals to age well in a place that suits their needs while continuing to grow personally, contribute meaningfully, and remain included in their communities. Guided by the World Health Organization's Age-Friendly Communities framework, this report combines the latest evidence with insights from Healthwatch Suffolk and the Integrated Care Academy. It explores what healthy ageing means for Suffolk and identifies opportunities to support all residents in living longer, healthier, and more fulfilling lives.

This report is not just about understanding the challenges—it's about envisioning and working towards a future where Suffolk is a place where everyone can live and age well.



Suffolk's population is ageing, almost 1 in 4 people in Suffolk are 65 and over (24.1%).

The population of older people is predicted to increase further, and in 20 years, 1 in 3 people will be 65 and over. But the health of Suffolk's older population is varied, with many people having multiple long-term conditions.

Importantly, the process of ageing is far from uniform, with inequalities profoundly shaping how individuals experience later life, influencing health, wellbeing, and access to opportunities.

Ageing well isn't just about life beyond 65; for some, poor health begins far earlier, with inequalities driving significant variation—while some individuals in their 80s are running marathons, others in their 50s struggle with basic daily activities, highlighting the urgent need to address these disparities much earlier in life, with a clear focus on prevention.

Suffolk's population is ageing: Almost 1 in 4 people in Suffolk are 65 and over (24.1%) this is higher than England (18.7%). 6.8% of Suffolk residents are 80 and over compared to 5.1% for England as a whole.

Population projection data (based on 2018 projections) indicates that over the next 20 years the population will grow by 6.5%. However, the biggest growth is forecast to be in the 65 and over age group – with a 32% increase in the population aged 65 and over. **In 20 years, it is estimated that 1 in 3 people in Suffolk will be age 65 and over.**

Life expectancy at age 65 has increased both nationally and locally in the last 20 years. However, recent data shows that life expectancy increases have stalled, and in some instances, declined.

In Suffolk:

- Females aged 65 years can expect to live for a further 21.7 years,
- Males can expect to live for a further 19.3 years.

But values are statistically higher than the England values.

Whilst overall life expectancy is important, the years of life spent in 'good health' is crucial. Both at an individual and population level, spending years of life in declining health is sub-optimal. 2018-20 data indicates that Suffolk males aged 65 and over have a healthy life expectancy of only 13.0 years, and for females the value is 12.5 years. **This means our ageing population spend a significant portion of their lives in declining health.**

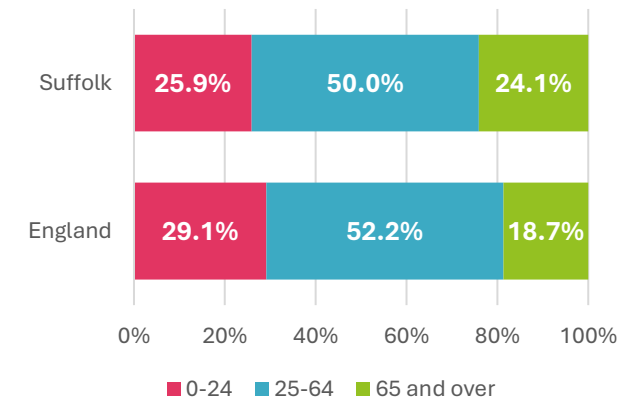
Inequalities also persist in our communities. Suffolk's life expectancy for males aged 65 and over living in the most deprived areas is 3.4 years less than those in the least deprived areas. For females, the gap is 2.7 years. At lower tier local authority, the greatest inequality in males is in Mid Suffolk (4.5 years) and in females in Ipswich (4.7 years).

In Suffolk and But Essex, data shows inequalities in the age of onset of multiple health conditions for those living in the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived areas. The largest difference is in our But population **where 30% of people living in the least deprived areas have multiple conditions, compared to 46% of those in the most deprived areas.**

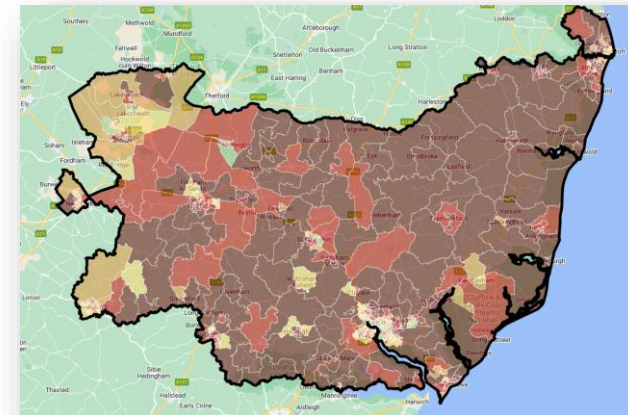
Data from [global research](#) can help us identify causes of poor health and risk factors and causes of death. In 2021 in Suffolk the top causes of illness, disability, or early death for those aged 70 and over were Covid-19, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease and stroke.

We have already seen large increases in morbidity and mortality due to dementia and Alzheimer's disease. **Looking to the future, the number of people living with dementia in Suffolk is likely to increase by nearly half (49%) in the next 20 years; and most of these new cases will be in people aged over 85.** But dementia is not an inevitable consequence of ageing, and there are opportunities for prevention particularly in relation to early detection and modifiable health behaviours. Recent research highlights that [addressing 14 modifiable risk factors](#), starting in childhood and continuing throughout life, could prevent or delay nearly half of dementia cases.

Age breakdown of the population



Where do our older populations live?
Take a look at [our map on Local Insight!](#)





“It is too simplistic to say that more older people inevitably means a greater burden of disease and disability.

While overall a growing older population is driving greater demand for health and care services, such a calculation misses the possibility of improving health in later life and fails to account for the fact that investing in more appropriate services and interventions may reduce demand for more expensive forms of care.”

Source: [Age UK: The State of Health and Care of Older People in England 2024](#)

Ageing has often been framed negatively – especially in relation to ‘the cost of ageing to society’, but this detracts from the crucial role our older population play in society, including contributing to the economy, providing unpaid care and volunteering.

Conversations about an ageing society and its impact on health and social care are often framed in a negative light. This framing tends to focus on the challenges and potential burdens associated with an ageing population, such as increased healthcare costs, strain on social services, and the economic implications of a larger elderly population.

This is true even within our own strategies and plans – we identify the ‘growing elderly population’ as a **key challenge** in our [Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) – we are changing this in our refresh of the strategy and making ‘Ageing Well’ a priority area.

The Suffolk and North East Essex [Joint Forward Plan](#) frames this more positively- making ‘Age Well’ a priority area: supporting people and their carers to live safely and independently as they grow older. The [Norfolk and Waveney Joint Forward Plan](#) identifies the following objective for older people: “To have health, carer and support services that are fit for our ageing population – supporting people as they age, to lead longer, healthier, happier lives”.

It is true, that healthcare costs are increasing for older people in England. A higher proportion of older people need medical and social care for chronic illnesses and multiple long-term conditions compared to other age groups. This increases the demand on the NHS and social care systems, which are already stretched. Health and care services in England are under great pressure. Despite the best efforts of dedicated staff these [services are unable to meet the needs of all the older people requiring treatment, care and support](#). However, as the CMO’s report clearly asserts -whilst diseases, long-term conditions and disabilities become more common and accumulate as we become older, they are far from inevitable, even in later years.

While it's true that an ageing population presents some challenges, such as increased demand for health and care services, this demographic also plays a crucial role in the [economy and wider society](#) through continued work, volunteering, and caregiving. Focusing solely on the healthcare costs of an ageing society overlooks the broader societal and economic contributions that older adults continue to make.

Moreover, prioritising healthcare costs risks neglecting other essential areas, such as social inclusion, mental wellbeing, and the development of age-friendly environments. A holistic approach that values the ageing population as active participants in society rather than just as a financial burden is vital for fostering a more inclusive and resilient community.

The vital role of unpaid carers

Unpaid carers are essential for supporting older adults, enabling them to live independently and maintain their quality of life. They provide personalised care, reduce the burden on healthcare systems, and promote mental wellbeing by combating isolation. Unpaid carers often balance their caregiving duties with multiple other responsibilities. Many juggle caregiving with full- or part-time jobs, parenting, and running a home. The role can be physically, emotionally, and financially taxing, often leading to stress and burnout, with some then needing care themselves.

In Suffolk as of the [2021 census](#), **There were over 65,000 people providing some form of unpaid care**. This equates to around 8.6% of the population – statistically higher than England (8.3%). 6.7% of unpaid carers report being in bad or very bad health themselves, and nearly 1/3rd of carers (30.0%) provide more than 50 hours per week of unpaid care. Of Suffolk’s carers providing 50+ hours of care per week, 42% are 65 and over, compared to 37% for England and Wales.

National data highlights that [people living in more deprived areas provide more hours of unpaid care and at younger ages](#). Between the ages of 50 and 70, people living in the most deprived neighbourhoods are at least twice as likely to provide 35 or more hours of unpaid care per week compared to those in the least deprived neighbourhoods.

Whilst Suffolk family carers have approximately 25,000 family carers registered with Suffolk Family Carers (as of January 2025), there are likely to be many more carers out there that may not know or have access to support themselves.

Looking to the future, [adult children are more likely to provide unpaid care](#) compared with the general population. However, people are having less children, with the [Total Fertility Rate](#) being the lowest since records began in 1938. For future ageing populations, there will be lower numbers of adult children to provide support.

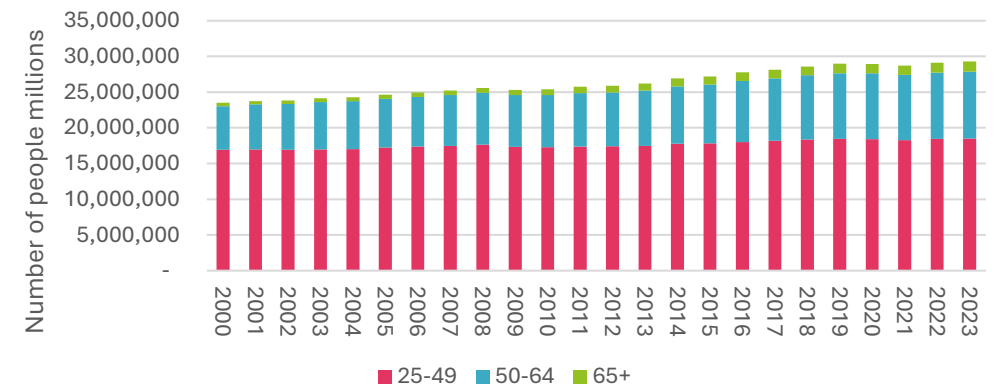
Many more older people are also working for longer. With more older people remaining in the workforce, providing inclusive and flexible employment opportunities is essential for building age-friendly communities and supporting better health, wellbeing, and economic security for older individuals.

There are many reasons why people are working for longer in England including:

- **Increased life expectancy (over preceding decades):** With long-term rising life expectancy, some individuals feel capable of continuing to work and contributing economically for longer periods. There are now almost one million more workers aged 65 and above in the UK labour market than there were at the beginning of the century. It is recognised that the most recent data indicates [life expectancy gains at older ages have declined since 2017](#).
- **Baby Boomers:** Demographic change over the last 20 years has contributed to an ageing workforce, as people born in the post-war baby boom increase through age cohorts.
- **Women in work:** Increases in state pension age from 50 to 65 between 2010 and 2020 increased the numbers of women in work. But they were also more likely to have stayed in work in the middle of their careers than their mothers.
- **Increases in state pension age:** The [State Pension age](#) is currently 66 years old for both men and women but will start gradually increasing again from 6 May 2026. State Pension age is gradually increasing for men and women, and will gradually rise to 67 for those born on or after April 1960.
- **Financial necessity:** the need for adequate retirement savings, coupled with rising living costs, drives people to extend their working years to secure financial stability.
- **Changing attitudes to work:** many people view work as a source of purpose and social interaction, leading them to choose to stay in the workforce longer.
- **Flexible work options:** the availability of flexible working arrangements, including part-time roles and remote work, makes it easier for older adults to remain employed. The [Centre for Ageing Better](#) notes that 65 and over age group are the second most likely to work zero-hours contracts and that growing numbers are choosing to continue to work full-time up to and beyond the state pension age.

- [In the UK](#), more than one in nine (11.5%) are now working past their 65th birthday - double the one in 20 (5.2%) working in 2000.
- Workers aged 65 and above are predominately self-employed and working part-time but there is a growing number continuing in full-time employment up to and beyond the state pension age.
- Data (shown in the chart below) indicates that the number of people aged 65 and over in employment almost tripled, from 457,000 in 2000 to 1.4 million in 2023.

Number of people in employment, by age, UK, 2000 to 2023



Source: [ONS: Labour Force Survey](#), [Centre for Ageing Better](#)

The Health Foundation note that [Many people will need to work longer](#) due to the rising state pension age, but if they are unable to remain in work during their 50s, they will struggle to do so beyond 65. Additionally, health inequalities between local areas are also anticipated to, reinforcing an existing pattern of worsening health and employment outcomes in areas with historically high rates of health-related economic inactivity.

Providing inclusive work and employment opportunities are crucial for fostering age-friendly communities and ensuring better health outcomes for older individuals. There are local business opportunities for innovation of products and technologies that support a growing ageing population, such as healthcare, leisure, technology, and housing solutions.

This growing market for services and technologies will help older people stay healthy and independent in their homes and contribute to the Suffolk economy.



We must think holistically about the wider opportunities for prevention and early intervention, both clinical and non-clinical, whilst recognising the substantial work already underway in these areas.

There is a pressing need to scale up and accelerate our efforts to have a more profound and sustained impact.

Our ageing population, with more people living with chronic conditions, working longer, and balancing caring responsibilities, presents both challenges and opportunities.

To enhance the quality of life for older adults, we must not only continue improving health and wellbeing but also create environments that actively support healthy ageing.

With a significant proportion of our community being older, our focus should be on making Suffolk a truly Age-Friendly county.

By focusing on preventive measures, early interventions and inclusive environments, it's possible to improve health *and* reduce the healthcare costs associated with ageing as well as improving the overall wellbeing of older adults. There is already great work going on across the county that should be recognised....



Ipswich and East Suffolk Alliance have published a practical guide to help people in the area live well and remain healthy and independent for longer. You can view it and download it [online](#). It contains helpful tips as well as links and key contacts for residents.



[Flamingo Challenge video link](#)

Can you (**safely**) stand like a flamingo? Test your strength and balance with the [#FlamingoChallenge!](#)

You should be able to stand on one leg for up to 35 seconds at age 60-69, 20 seconds for those aged 70-79, and 5 seconds if you're aged 80 and over.



[OASIS video link](#)

The [OASIS service](#) was piloted in 2024 by Age UK Norwich in Lowestoft. The aim of the service is to fill a gap for Older People in the Waveney Area following the closure of Age UK Suffolk during the Pandemic. This includes helping people navigate complex information.

We must think holistically about the wider opportunities for prevention and early intervention, both clinical and non-clinical, **whilst recognising the substantial work already underway in these areas**. There is a pressing need to scale up and accelerate our efforts to have a more profound and sustained impact.

Key areas for focus include:

- Promoting health-enhancing behaviours:** Encouraging regular exercise, a balanced diet, and avoiding smoking or excessive alcohol consumption can prevent or delay the onset of chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers.
- Community-based support:** Expanding resources and services that help older adults maintain independence can delay or prevent the need for residential care.
- Mental health support:** Early intervention can enhance quality of life and reduce the need for more intensive care later.
- Regular health screenings:** Early detection of conditions, such as high blood pressure, cholesterol, or cancer, through screening enables timely and effective treatment.
- Promoting active ageing:** Supporting participation in community activities helps older adults remain physically and mentally active, preserving independence and delaying the need for long-term care services.
- Strength and balance:** Prioritising programmes that promote strength and balance can play a crucial role in preventing falls and frailty, which are common and serious health issues in older populations.
- Vaccinations:** Ensuring older adults receive vaccines against illnesses like the flu, shingles, and pneumonia can prevent serious health complications and hospital admissions.
- Enhancing support networks:** Strengthening community programmes that foster support networks can improve wellbeing and reduce loneliness among older adults.

A 2024 [Local Government Association](#) report on earlier action and support (EAAS), found the impact of 10 early interventions (including initiatives such as social prescribing and community-based care), delivered savings of £3.17 for every £1 spent on them. If scaled up across all local authority areas, the 10 interventions combined would deliver a net benefit of approximately £7.6 billion.

We know our population is ageing, people are living with more chronic conditions, working for longer, and there are many with caring responsibilities. There are opportunities to enhance the quality of life for older people. We must continue to take action to improve the health and wellbeing of our population ... **But** we also need to create environments that facilitate healthy ageing. As a large proportion of our population is older, we should focus on making Suffolk somewhere that is **Age Friendly**.





Age-friendly communities are more than just “friendly communities”—they are inclusive, well-designed environments that support health, independence, and social connection for older adults.

They prioritise accessible housing, transportation, healthcare, and opportunities to prevent isolation and promote active ageing.

These communities go beyond kindness, by creating sustainable infrastructure and policies that empower older residents to live full, independent lives.

An introduction to the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Age Friendly Communities...

Creating age-friendly environments enables all people to age well in a place that is right for them, whilst continuing to develop personally, be included, and contribute to their communities and enabling their independence and health. Age-friendly communities are more than just “friendly communities”—they are inclusive, well-designed environments that support health, independence, and social connection for older adults. They prioritise accessible housing, transportation, healthcare, and opportunities to prevent isolation and promote active ageing. These communities go beyond kindness by creating sustainable infrastructure and policies that empower older residents to live full, independent lives.

- Age-friendly environments benefit all community members by:**
- ✓ removing physical and social barriers
 - ✓ fostering inclusiveness
 - ✓ improves accessibility
 - ✓ addressing gender inequities
 - ✓ helping build the resilience of communities for emergencies



[Age Friendly Communities video link](#)

Age-friendly cities and communities improve access to key services and enable people to be and do what they value through action across eight domains:

1. Housing
2. Social Participation
3. Respect and Social Inclusion
4. Civic Participation and Empowerment
5. Communication and Information
6. Community Support and Health Services
7. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings
8. Transportation

It is important to recognise that these domains overlap and interact with each other. For example, poor provision of accessible outdoor spaces and buildings hampers participation and social inclusion.

Housing

- Housing directly impacts health, independence, and overall quality of life. As people age, they may face mobility challenges, chronic health conditions, and a greater need for accessible living environments. Housing that is safe, and adaptable can help reduce the risk of falls and injuries and facilitate access to healthcare and social support.
- Suitable housing is a vital component of age-friendly communities as it ensures older adults can live safely, maintain their independence, and access necessary services. It also helps prevent social isolation and supports their physical and mental wellbeing.
- [Over 50% of the non-decent homes in the owner-occupied sector are headed by someone over the age of 55.](#) The greatest number of people aged 55 and over in poverty are in the owner-occupied sector, rather than in private or social rented sector. 37% of people of pension age renting privately are living in relative poverty.
- [The Centre for Ageing Better's 2024 report](#) found that by removing the most serious risks to people's health and safety from the country's poorest quality homes where the head of household is 55 or over, would result in savings to the NHS of nearly £600 million per year.

Social Participation

- Social participation helps individuals build meaningful relationships, reinforcing community ties and providing a sense of identity and purpose.
- Engaging in social, cultural, and recreational activities contributes to both physical and mental health, enhancing quality of life, it may also help in reducing risks associated with sedentary behaviour.
- By offering opportunities for interaction, age-friendly communities can help older adults avoid social isolation, which is linked to poorer mental and physical health outcomes. Participation in community activities provides opportunities for older adults to learn new skills, engage in hobbies, and continue personal development, contributing to a fulfilling and active life.
- It is important social participation opportunities are affordable and accessible.

Respect and social inclusion

- Respect and inclusion are vital in helping older people remain actively involved in social, cultural, and community activities, which fosters a stronger sense of belonging.
- Tackling ageism remains a key area of focus. [Ageism](#) is often dismissed as causing no harm, yet evidence shows that it causes significant damage to individuals, the economy and society.
- A respectful and inclusive environment enhances the mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing of older adults.
- Furthermore, respect for people of all ages strengthens intergenerational relationships, fostering greater understanding and support between different generations. By valuing everyone's contributions, regardless of age, communities become more united and diverse, benefitting everyone.

Civic participation and employment

- People in later life should be able to continue to contribute to their communities. Those options can include paid employment or voluntary work as well as being engaged in democracy.
- Fostering opportunities for older populations to engage in both voluntary and paid work, can enhance their social connections and fulfilment.
- Accessible infrastructure and ongoing training help remove barriers and keep older individuals engaged in the workforce.
- Civic participation is also crucial for age-friendly communities as it empowers older adults to influence decisions that affect their lives, helps social connections, and ensures their voices are heard. These voices shouldn't be silenced to 'older people' groupings - participation in intergenerational conversations is vital.

More about the 8 domains and their importance in Suffolk...

Communication and Information

- Accessible communication allows all older adults to stay connected and informed regardless of language, digital access, or sensory impairments.
- A large portion of our time is now spent online, this shift can leave older populations more vulnerable to exclusion, as they may be less familiar with digital tools and platforms.
- Varied communication methods should be available. This can help in ensuring information is accessible.
- Communicating and information processing may also be challenging for older adults due to factors associated with ageing such as hearing or vision loss, memory decline, and slower information processing. Effective design—like larger fonts for visual clarity and clear, paced spoken communication for those with hearing impairments are also helpful. Oral communication is also valued, especially for those with limited digital skills.

Community support and health services

- As we age, we tend to accumulate more health and care needs. Ensuring people can maintain their independence for as long as possible is important.
- We often associate ageing as being about 'frailty' and use medical terminology when we speak about ageing. Frailty and falls are key causes of injury and even death in older populations, but there are opportunities for prevention, and the promotion of strength and balance-based activities that promote healthy ageing.
- Regular health check-ups, screenings, and vaccinations are crucial for early detection and management of health issues, but wider determinants of health play a key role here too.
- [Tackling dehydration in older people](#) is also important.
- Caregivers also need to be supported. They play a crucial role in the lives of older adults, providing essential support with daily tasks, personal care, emotional support, and medical needs.
- The work of Suffolk's [compassionate communities](#) is paramount: Working with empathy, integrity, respect and as a community, to enable and empower individuals with an understanding of their care choices in their last year of life.

Transport

- Transport encompasses a range of factors that ensure older adults can navigate their environment safely and comfortably. From public transport to active travel, it's important to acknowledge the range of options that exist. This includes the availability of active travel options like walking and cycling, which are essential for maintaining health and independence.
- For those who drive, it's important that they are fit to do so, and that street lighting is adequate to enhance visibility and safety.
- By addressing these elements, communities can create a more inclusive environment where older adults can stay engaged, mobile, and connected.
- Access to transport can be a significant issue in rural and coastal areas due to the limited availability of public transportation options, longer distances between destinations, and lower population density, which makes it less economically viable to provide frequent services. This can lead to social isolation, and it becomes challenging to reach essential services, healthcare, and social activities. Lack of cycle and footpaths, personal safety concerns, and declining health are [key barriers](#) to people in their 50s and 60s walking or cycling as a means of travel.

Outdoor spaces and buildings

- The outside world and public buildings have a significant impact on people's independence, accessibility, mobility and quality of life.
- Things that are important for an age friendly community include: a pleasant and clean environment with green spaces, age-friendly buildings that are easy to navigate, accessible, safe and adequately lit, safe pavements and walkways, pedestrian crossings and adequate rest areas, and an environment that feels generally safe and welcoming.
- Coastal areas such as the East Suffolk coastline tend to attract older people, and people that have retired. However, having an older population also [results in higher health and care needs](#). The coast offers many benefits, including better access to outdoor spaces for exercise, opportunities for social contact and lower air pollution. However, it can also make transport, digital connection and wider connectivity more difficult.

Suffolk data

Housing

- From 2018 to 2043, the percentage of households with the household reference person aged 65 and over is expected to increase by 32.3% from 114,074 in 2018, to 168,377 in 2043.
- Currently 59% of Suffolk properties have poor energy performance certificate (EPC) ratings of D or below. Households with older adults and those with multiple generations living in them were more likely to be living in these lower energy efficiency homes with lower median energy efficiency scores.
- Housing for Older People Supply Recommendations (HOPSR) identifies a significant difference between the recommended supply and actual supply of age-exclusive housing in Suffolk (housing with age restrictions on who can live there, with buildings designed to be age friendly but little to no support is provided). In 2018, there were only 707 age-exclusive homes in the county, whereas the HOPSR tool advises 5,932 homes are needed to meet the demand of the population in the county.
- Suffolk County Council planning is strongly encouraging planning policy (local plans, neighbourhood plans etc) to be supportive of housing built to be adaptable and accessible - meaning **M4(2) of building standards** – to meet the needs of an ageing population without restricting the needs of younger occupants. This **2023 checklist from East Suffolk** sets out what M4(2) standards looks like in homes and planning applications.

Source: [Suffolk Housing and Health Needs Assessment](#) (2024)

Communication and Information

- Approximately 17,500 residents aged 65 and over were estimated to have a moderate or severe visual impairment in 2023.
- An estimated 118,500 people aged 65 and over expected to have some hearing loss, with 15,500 experiencing severe hearing loss in 2023.
- 4,000 people aged 65 and over were estimated to have a learning disability in 2023.
- 2024 5G network coverage was 48.2% for Suffolk, lower than the average for England local authorities (84.6%).
- The Digital Exclusion Risk Index (DERI) score explores the risk of digital exclusion at a localised level. This can't be broken down by age, but when looking at local authority data, East Suffolk has the highest DERI score compared to other Suffolk local authorities.

Source: [Projecting Older People Population Information System \(POPPI\)](#), [ONS](#), [DERI](#)

Social Participation

- Local data by age for cultural participation can be limited, highlighting a gap for further research. However, some age data is available for Suffolk libraries. The number of borrowers aged 65 and over during 2023/24 was 16,803 (around 25% of all borrowers). The number of loans to these customers was 606,994, representing 29% of all physical loans.
- It is recognised that there is a distinct difference between loneliness and social isolation. Local estimates are only available regarding loneliness. Suffolk's Mental Health Needs Assessment estimated that using national 2021 estimates, there may be 218,200 people aged 65 and over in Suffolk who "some of the time/ often or always feel lonely".
- Community Action Suffolk (CAS) is coming to the end of a three-year project offering support and development to Men's Sheds in Suffolk. As of June 2024, there were 23 sheds up and running in Suffolk with a further 4 in development.

Source: [CAS](#), [Suffolk Mental Health Needs Assessment](#)

Community support and health services

- Nearly 167,000 people of pensionable age receiving winter fuel payments in 2021/22.
- 78.4% of people aged 65 and over who were still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement services (statistically lower than England: 81.8%).
- Recorded prevalence of dementia of 3.8% in those aged 65 and over in 2020 – equivalent to 7,200 people.
- Emergency hospital admissions due to falls in people aged 65 and over in 2022/23: a rate of 1,471 per 100,000 population (2,840 falls – around 8 per day).
- 1 in 4 older people are dehydrated. Tackling dehydration in older people** can also help, as dehydration can lead to increased vulnerability to strokes, infections and falls.

Source: [Fingertips](#), [Local Insight \(Index of Multiple Deprivation\)](#)

Respect and social inclusion

- There is a lack of Suffolk specific data about ageism. However, if we apply national statistics to the Suffolk population aged 50 and over, this equates to around 160,000 individuals experiencing ageism in the last year.
- Social inclusion can be impacted by deprivation. Pockets of deprivation in both rural and coastal areas including Sudbury, Brandon, Lowestoft and Felixstowe. It is estimated around 12,400 people aged 65 and over live in Suffolk's 20% most deprived areas.
- Being respectful of our ageing population means listening to their voices, and improving communication. [Have a look at this short video from Suffolk and North East Essex's pop up booth events.](#)

Source: [ONS Mid Year Estimates](#) 2023

Transport

- Feedback from one Suffolk Primary Care Network (PCN) asserts: **"Patients needing home visits are not usually household they're transport bound – they don't have a way of getting to us"**.
- Only 36% of rural Suffolk is within a 15 minute walk or public transport journey of employment and only 77% of residents within 30 minutes. This could make transport for those working in later life more challenging.
- There were 12.2m bus journeys in 2023, up from 9.5m the year before but still short of pre-Covid level of 15.5m. Elderly and disabled concessionary passenger numbers remain subdued at just under 3m journeys, or just 25% of total journeys (around 70% of their pre-Covid level).
- The [Connecting Communities](#) service exists to help people travel around Suffolk who might not have access to a regular bus service. However, survey findings about the service from 2023 indicate there might be a lack of understanding around fares, with their survey noting: "Senior Citizen Bus pass holders thought they could use passes on rural transport services".

Source: Suffolk PCN correspondence (2024), Transport East Transport Strategy Levelling up Rural and Coastal communities (2021), [Suffolk Bus Service Improvement Plan](#) (2024), [Rural Transport in Suffolk Survey](#) (2023)

Civic participation and employment

- Suffolk data shows over the last 20 years, the numbers in employment and employment rate of people aged 65 and over has increased.
- Suffolk data is only available from 2005, but shows the increasing trend of residents aged 65 and over in employment. In 2005, 7,500 people aged 65 and over were in employment, compared to over 21,800 in 2024. This is equivalent to a percentage increase of 191%! For reference, between 2005-2023 (latest data available) our 65 and over population increased in population size by 44.2%. The latest employment rate for people aged 65 and over in Suffolk is 12.1% (2024).
- Over half (56.4%) of Suffolk's routine workers are aged 50 years or older, a statistically significantly higher proportion when compared to the England routine and manual population (53.3%).
- Take a look at the new [Suffolk Good Health @ Work](#) programme. Good Health @Work supports, recognises, and celebrates organisations across Suffolk. There is useful and highly informative resources covering 6 key topics that can help make businesses a great place to work.

Source: [ONS: Labour Force Survey](#), [Mid-year population estimates](#), [Suffolk Routine and Manual Workers Profile](#)

Outdoor spaces and buildings

- 27,390 people aged 65 and over live in coastal communities, which is 14.9% of all 65+ in Suffolk. Across all ages, 12.5% of the population lives in coastal communities.
- Data for this area split by age group is limited- and may benefit from further research.
- Whilst air quality in Suffolk is generally good, there are a small number of Air Quality Management Areas or AQMAs where pollution levels (Nitrogen Dioxide specifically) exceed Government guidelines (6 as of January 2025).
- Suffolk has more than 900 County wildlife sites that represent approximately 5% of the county.
- AccessAble has 503 access guides listed for Suffolk.

Source: [ONS Small Area Population Estimates 2022](#), [Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#), [AccessAble](#)



Framlingham is our
only officially
recognised Age
Friendly Community
as of October 2024...
but this needs to
change!

Hour Community...
It's about time.

Framlingham is our only officially recognised Age Friendly Community as of October 2024... but this needs to change!

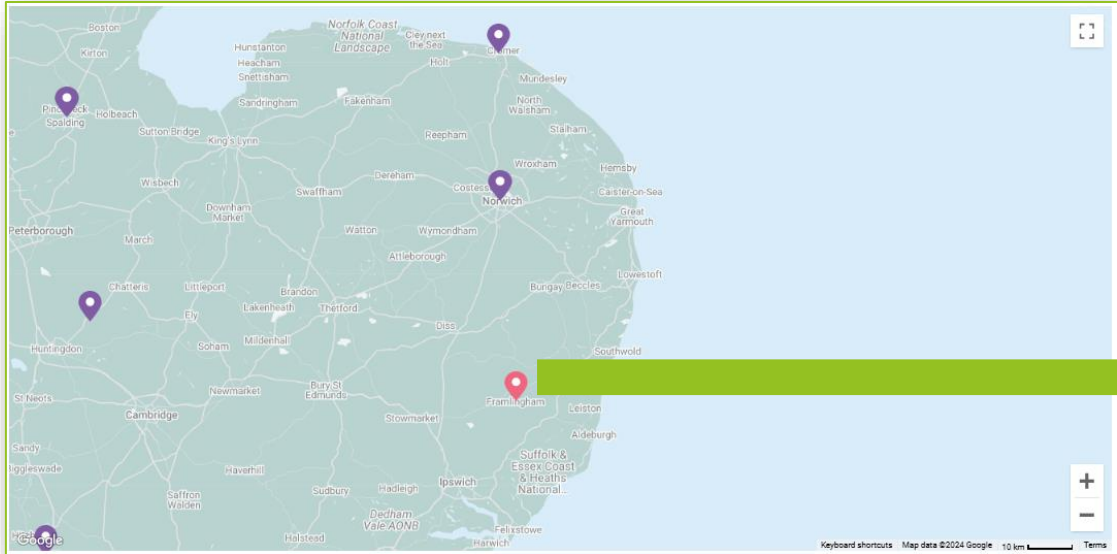
The UK Network of Age-friendly Communities is a growing movement, with over 79 places across the country committed to making their community a better place to age in.

The Centre for Ageing Better works with the Network to provide guidance, connect places and offer support to member communities as they work towards making their services and infrastructure more age-friendly. The UK Network is part of a global movement led by the World Health Organisation, affiliated to the Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities.

View the map of Age-Friendly Communities [here](#).

[The number of Age-friendly Communities in the UK has more than doubled in four years.](#)

Age-friendly Communities cover areas with over 8.4 million people aged 50 or over - including Framlingham in Suffolk.



Framlingham

Framlingham is a market town and civil parish in Suffolk, England. Of Anglo-Saxon origin, it appears in the 1086 Domesday Book.


It has a population of 4,016 – of which approximately 51% are aged 50 or over. Framlingham is the smallest member of the UK Network.

The town is working towards becoming a member of the Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities.

Framlingham Age Friendly is led by Hour Community Charity.

Contact

Nick Corke
nickcorke57@gmail.com
CEO



[View all related content](#)

Hour Community... It's about time.

Framlingham Age Friendly is led by Hour Community Charity. The initiative was created to support the residents of Framlingham and its surrounding villages. Beginning in 2011 and becoming a registered charity in 2016, they have since grown and continue to respond to identified need, employing the skills of dedicated volunteers.

They can provide a dedicated volunteer to help within the home, and also offer a befriending service, a mental health drop in cafe and provide transport to medical appointments. Some of their activities include:

- Hour Community's **Forget Me Not Club** is a dementia friendly lunch club run by some fantastic volunteers who provide a whole host of activities and entertainment to over 30 people each week.
- The **Furniture Project** is a service dedicated to providing good quality, unwanted furniture to individuals and families in need, in Framlingham and abutting villages. They will collect your unwanted items and sell at an affordable price.
- **Hour Shed** is designed to bring people together in an environment where they can share skills and ideas to repair and upcycle furniture or work on their own woodwork projects. It's also a place to socialise and chat.
- Hour Community can take residents from Mills Meadow (weather permitting) for a ride in our **Trishaws**, to enable them to once again feel the "wind in their hair".
- The concept of **The Worry Tree** cafe is the brainchild of Amelia Corke. Through her own experiences and personal knowledge of Mental Illness she felt that there had to be a way to help others dealing with mental health conditions from feeling isolated and alone. As a result, the Worry tree was born and set up in Framlingham.



Source: [Hour Community](https://www.hourcommunity.co.uk)

A visit to Hour Community in October 2024...

Hour Community's office, based out of the library in the centre of Framlingham, is constantly busy with door knocks and people popping in to pick up keys, to update on various issues, or to have a chat about latest developments (including asking the top speed of their newly acquired TukTuk). The office space is packed with promotional materials, pinned to the wall is an ambitious and exciting vision for an age friendly community development. Old campaign materials are lined up, and two computer spaces sit next to a window where Nick and Stuart sit.

A volunteer pops in on her day off to pick up material for their 'kiosk on the hill' – an unused telephone box they bought for £1 to display promotional material (this month the theme is mental health). A quick conversation with her and her daughter at the kiosk highlights the community passion, : “We both popped down on our day off, it's important to us, and a great community to be part of”.

Stuart is off to help move a fridge for an older resident but is also covering a frequently ringing phone. He describes one of the many challenges faced by people growing older in Framlingham:

“Some of the houses are hundreds of years old, they're just not set up for people to grow old in – one lady lives in one room of her home – she's in a wheelchair and when we do manage to get her out, we have to scrape by the walls of the house – it isn't accessible”.

Nick points out:

“Framlingham is a great community; people want to relocate to retire here- but they don't think about the long term. We're rural and there aren't many transport options without a car, if they haven't got family members or support, they quickly become isolated and need help with the basics. People often don't plan for getting old – loss of mobility, freedoms you take for granted such as getting around easily. Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approaches are really the only way forward for communities such as Framlingham. We need place-based support – especially for ageing populations. We often get calls from elsewhere in Suffolk (outside Framlingham and surrounding parishes)- we would love to be able to support them – but we can only do so much.

Stuart replies:

“But.. it's also about our services being set up to think more about the population they serve. We run a transport service for hospital appointments, and the hospital will book in an appointment for someone at say 08:30am. If they are elderly, can't dress themselves, they will never make that appointment. Can't the bookings be 'smarter'? If they booked it for 11am say – then a person would stand a chance at getting there, they may even not need our services, as they could get other transport”.

Hour Community's services are constantly in need, and resources are always stretched. Nick also notes that:

“We do our best, but we are reliant on funding from places like the National Lottery. It's incredibly time intensive to put bids in, being financially set for the future... well it's not guaranteed. If we had a regular source of annual funding, not lots – say between £20-50k, we could do so much more with our time...I'm also concerned about succession planning, I won't be around forever, and places like this need someone to take the reins when I leave. I'm not planning on going anywhere for a few years yet, but I have started to train up a new colleague to help for the future.”

Nick's vision is to build an age friendly community hub–“Hope Park” on land opposite Thomas Mills High School:

“It's a long process, we're lucky to have land where the owner is patient, but I want this for our community- somewhere we can create a legacy that means the older community can access what they need in a safe, inclusive environment. We have a meeting with planners later, but it's not an easy process...”

Kiosk on the hill:



The Framlingham Age Friendly Community led by Hour Community is an excellent example of local initiative, but...

- There is only one in the whole of Suffolk.
- Funding is not guaranteed and often time spent on bids is at the cost of directly supporting people.
- There needs to be further work to understand what initiatives are happening in other areas of Suffolk that could build a Suffolk network of age friendly communities.

What is clear is: **every Suffolk community would benefit from an Hour Community... It's about time.**

Hour community have recently completed their own independent report on ageing better & making Framlingham an age friendly town. Some key findings from the report are highlighted below:



Outdoor spaces and buildings: All of us, as we age, want to feel as though we can continue to navigate freely around our communities.



In order for this to happen, we need to ensure, wherever possible, provision is in place for the following:

- Sufficient footpaths and pavements. These need to be wide enough, level, in good order, and with dropped kerbs regularly spaced.
- Access to shops and businesses is suitable, or temporary adaptations can be made, for example, ramps, which can be easily installed and removed.
- Shops and businesses are laid out in a way that allows for easy movement, with signage and labelling clear and easy to see/read.
- Street lighting, especially during the autumn and winter months is required to be in all key areas, where people are most likely going to need it.

Social participation: For many, Socialising, particularly as we get older is one of the ways in which we can remain connected to our communities. In all our years working with Framlingham residents, we have discovered that some people remain socially isolated due to a number of factors:



- Not all people want to socialise in groups
- Having no transport
- Ill health and disability
- Lack of information on what is available

As much we would all like to think that post-retirement, we will continue getting together with long-term friends and family, but with the world being more mobile now than ever, we often find family separated by great distances, and, as we get older our friends will either become unable to meet up or will inevitably pass away, potentially leaving us feeling very lonely.

Communication and information: Whilst it is true to say that much of this information gets filtered through the community by way of word of mouth, we should not rely on that as a means of communication to those who are not technologically savvy. Conversely, it is not entirely accurate to suggest all people over a certain age are either unable or unwilling to engage in digital communication, it simply needs to be just one option.

It is all too easy to make assumptions about what information different cohorts want. All you need to do is watch daytime tv to see the number of adverts that are designed to reach and resonate with the older population; life insurance, funeral planning, potions and gadgets for arthritis – you get the picture. All of this can feed into the public perception that older people are just sitting at home, waiting for the inevitable, where, in reality, many, many older people still have the skills and knowledge to live fulfilling and productive lives. If only that information were so easily disseminated into the wider community.



Respect and social inclusion: There are always opportunity to ensure such things as adequate numbers of benches throughout the town, spaced at adequate distances, and something which is easy to survey and rectify if necessary. Likewise, public toilets, a subject of much consternation in recent years due to many around the country closing, are an absolute requirement. As an alternative to building new public toilets, maybe all businesses can sign up to allow access to their toilets to someone in need, with clear signage to the effect, making people feel welcome, rather than feeling embarrassed or awkward for asking. These are just two examples of relatively easy changes that can be made that will create a welcome feeling when arriving in Framlingham.



Transport: Public transport (buses) is in crisis across rural areas of England, and this is a problem seemingly difficult to address for more complex reasons than many of us understand. What is clear, locally, is that buses are underused by residents, which then makes the provision of the bus service untenable from the point of statutory providers.



The paradox here lies within the disconnect between what the public are saying they need, and the data held by the bus providers. The public are screaming out for good, regular bus services, but, according to the providers, the services are not being used, making it economically unviable, a classic 'use it or lose it' scenario.

Community support and health services: Many of the appointments sent to residents in Framlingham are made for early in the morning. So, anyone not able to make their own way to hospital, receiving an appointment for 08:00, would have no chance of using public transport, as a bus would never be running at around 07:00, in order to get there on time. However, those responsible for making appointments took into consideration the postcode of the patient, maybe a 13:00 appointment would enable them to make use of the bus service and use their bus pass too.



Housing: There is a housing crisis nationwide... However, what we might overlook are the potential benefits to the wider community, of more suitable housing for older people. As we get older, many of us start to plan for a time when our current accommodation might be too big, too much to manage, with stairs that might not be suitable for the installation of a stair lift. With the provision of housing beneficial to older people, they would be free to sell their current home in the knowledge that they would be able to continue living well within a community they know and love. This adds to the open housing market properties more suitable for families who are either existing residents or those wanting to move to the area, addressing the problems of under-occupancy.



Civic participation and Employment: Age should not be an obstacle to employment or volunteering. As retirement age approaches, many people will be looking forward to a rest from getting up early every morning to go to work, and instead, planning all the activities they have had to put off due to a lack of time. However, not everyone wants to retire, or feels they can afford to retire, and would rather continue to work for the extra income. Not everyone has much more than a state pension to look forward to, which can make them feel very uncertain about the future, and this can fuel the need to sail past their retirement milestone, choosing instead to continue working for as long as they feel able to.



This is not the first time the concept of Age Friendly Communities (AFC) has been explored for Suffolk. A small survey conducted in 2022 collected views on what enables people to feel included and remain active in their community as they get older.

Additionally, as part of this year's Annual Public Health Report, Healthwatch Suffolk conducted research 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.

In November 2024, Public Health and Communities, alongside the Integrated Care Academy, ran three Challenge Lab sessions. These sessions brought together people from across the Suffolk system to share ideas, discuss challenges, and explore practical solutions. The workshops provided a space for collaboration, helping to identify realistic actions and strengthen connections among those working to support change across the system.

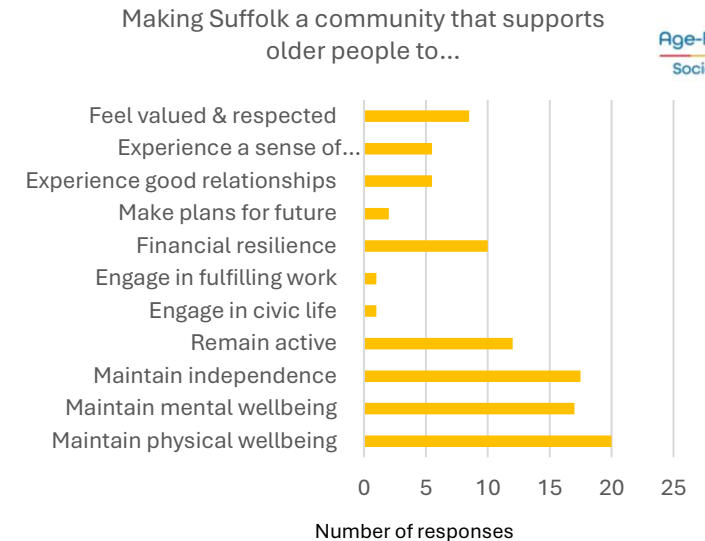
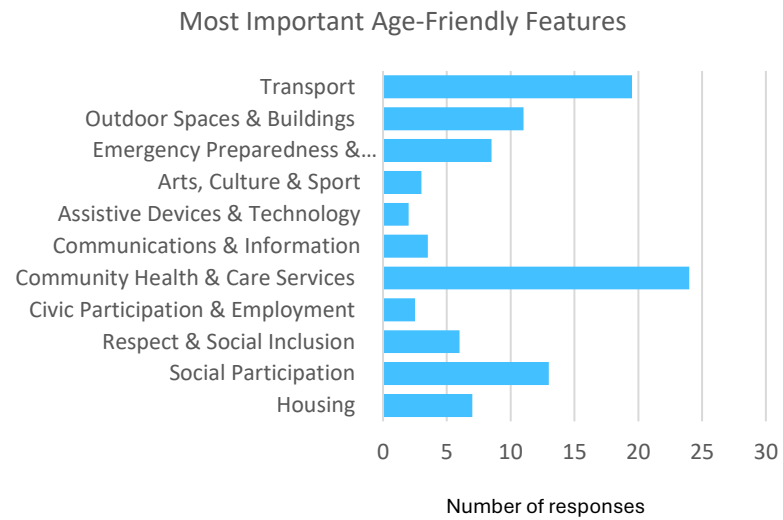
Looking back and moving forward....



This is not the first time the concept of Age Friendly Communities (AFC) has been explored for Suffolk. A small survey conducted in 2022 collected views on what enables people to feel included and remain active in their community as they get older.

The Community Survey was used to gauge AFC priorities in four sites: Buckden, Kelsall, Liverpool and Suffolk, and the survey was developed based on 8 of the WHO age-friendly domains.

Two additional categories were added based on the literature: Assistive devices and technology, and arts, culture and sport. Plus, a further category (relevant during the pandemic): Emergency preparedness.



Results:

- In Suffolk, 96 of 126 surveys were completed – 60 online, 36 on paper.
- What makes a place age-friendly? The top three responses were:
 1. Community health and care services
 2. Transport
 3. Social participation

For the next question, 11 aspects of life that research highlighted as being important to older people were provided to respondents to rate.

- What aspects of life are important as you grow older? The top three responses were:
 1. Maintaining physical wellbeing
 2. Maintain Independence
 3. Maintain mental wellbeing

Interviews with local residents/ service users and professionals/ volunteers were also conducted. Interviewers asked people what was happening in the site in terms of age-friendly work – the strengths and challenges – and what the actual and intended outcomes were:

- Strengths:**
- Charities with flexibility to meet local need quickly
 - Crossover between different areas of work (e.g. dementia & arts)
 - Collaborative working within & across sectors
 - Different organisations/ stakeholders work with a common purpose

- Challenges:**
- There could be better co-ordination between organisations across Suffolk in terms of the outcomes they are aiming to achieve .
 - Challenges re monitoring: no standardised measures; some resistance to data collection (people just want to do the interventions).
 - Challenges around communication: reaching people, especially in rural communities, and ensuring they are aware of available interventions.
 - There is no county wide service to pick up gaps in provision for older people at hyper local level.
 - There are big discrepancies in provision between areas that are not far away from each other. Need for a minimal level of provision across the county. It can be very hard to locate the support that is available for people.
 - Areas with high concentrations of people of other faiths and nationalities who are likely to feel very isolated, and where the services that are available are not appropriate for them.
 - There are areas where wealth and extreme poverty exist in close proximity to each other – how can mutual support & cohesion be fostered?
 - The wider community should be supporting people to be able to live independently – in some areas that works, in some it doesn't.

As part of this year's Annual Public Health Report, Healthwatch Suffolk conducted research 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. The project, and this report, have been structured according to key domains for creating Age-Friendly Communities. These are from the 'Age-Friendly Communities Framework' developed by the WHO.

A web form was used to gather opinions about ageing well in Suffolk and with 413 responses. In addition, the views of people from a diversity of local communities in the county were included, through the engagement of an array of local partners supporting the project. More in-depth discussions were held with 13 people from across Suffolk to learn more about their experiences of ageing locally. From their feedback, eight participants who shared an interesting story, represented one of the relevant domains, and provided consent were contacted for further information. A further two participants were identified by Healthwatch Suffolk Engagement and Community Officers at a community group where they were promoting the project. **The full report can be found here**, with summary information provided below.



People were asked:

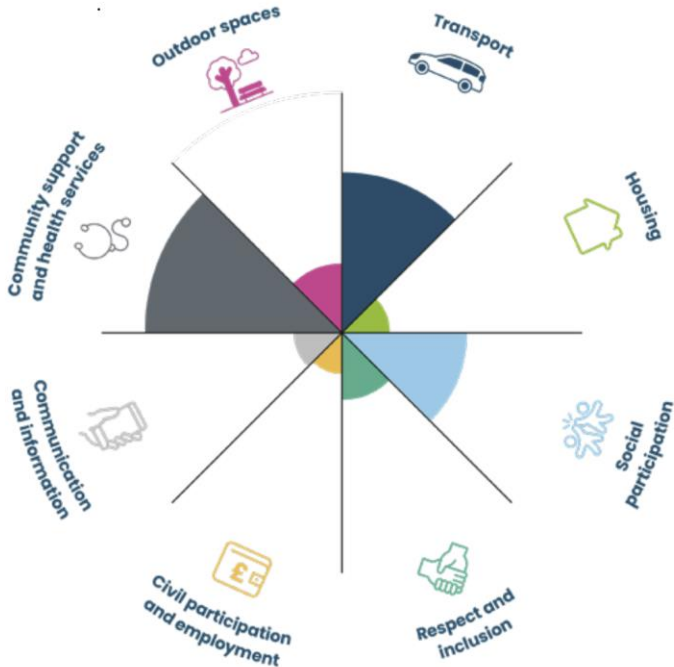
‘What three things are most **important** to help you age well in your community?’

The most frequently selected factors for ageing well were:

- 1. Access to community and health services’ (82% or 340 people)
- 2. Transportation’ (67% or 278 people),
- 3. Opportunities to be social’ (52% or 214 people)

‘What three things are likely to **prevent you from ageing well** in Suffolk?’

The biggest barriers (most selected factors) to ageing well in Suffolk were the **same domains** identified as the most important to ageing well. The biggest barrier reported by 73% (301 people) was access to community and health services, followed closely by transportation (72% or 299 people). These were followed by opportunities for social engagement (26% or 163 people).



Healthwatch Suffolk reflections on their 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.

- 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.
- However, 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.
- 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.

During their community engagement, Healthwatch also discovered the challenges people can face as they age. These are opportunities to help Suffolk become more age friendly:

- 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.

"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."

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



Suffolk voices:

“As we age, our world becomes smaller. We stop working, experience the loss of friends and family to illness and old age, our health both physical and mental can let us down, restricting us from doing the things we once took for granted. Being an older person, for some, can be lonely and isolating”.

A resident of a community in west Suffolk felt there is a lack of local facilities in their area (such as a community centre, shops, dentists, doctors, or social spaces to meet other people). The closure of the nearest food shop meant they had to travel into the town for basic items, but the bus service had been unreliable and costly. Since returning to the UK, they had struggled with loneliness and depression due to a lack of social opportunities and friends in their local area.



A local golf club manager has been instrumental in setting up dementia-friendly golf sessions (with the support of Wendy and Home Instead). They hold two sessions a month but cannot keep up with the demand for the service. Participating in golf has many benefits for people with dementia, helping to maintain coordination, balance, and mobility and offering other general health benefits. The sessions also provide family carers with respite too. They are encouraging other golf clubs to give up their course for just two hours a month to people with dementia, and other disabilities.

“I work in the hospital and am aware that the expectation of everyone going digital is really not helpful or inclusive for all patients, especially the elderly. Whilst some have the confidence and the means to have bought digital devices, and love using them, there are many who do not... services should have a duty to provide easily located, non-digital access via a telephone if not face to face.”



A resident shared their concerns over housing. They consider many people in their 60s are looking at downsizing their home but struggle to locate affordable housing options. They are also concerned about leaving behind friends and support networks. Furthermore, they share the challenges of living in a small village due to the lack of accessible public transport. Community transport is available, but they feel it is expensive and must be booked in advance.

“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.”

A resident of Ipswich shared how relocating from a small town in Essex to Ipswich had improved their access to healthcare, with more appointments available and services located nearby. They attributed their positive experience accessing healthcare to the confidence they had gained from years of advocating for their mum and sibling. They also highlight common misconceptions about older people, who they feel are often overlooked and disempowered. They stress the importance of healthcare professionals actively involving older people in their care without assumptions based on age.

“I endeavour to go out every day. This can be using my bus pass to go to see friends or family or shopping or going to another local town for a cup of tea or walk.

Last winter I walked into town and went to Ipswich library to read daily newspapers and make use of the warm space and interact with people. I caught a bus to Asda and made use of their OAP soup, roll & tea/ coffee for £1.

This gave me food, an outing, a warm space and enabled me to see people & feel part of society. I volunteer for St Elizabeth hospice, Blue Cross and Communities Together. This provides a ‘structure’ to my week and enables me to meet others and be part of society and my local community. It also ‘spins off’ to other opportunities and meeting others.”

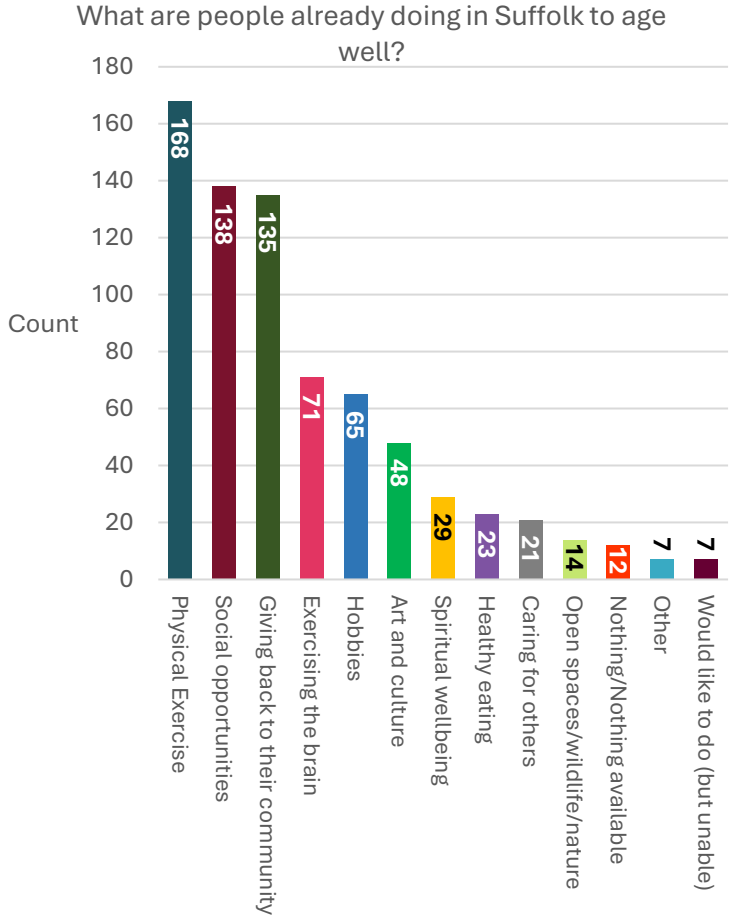
The Polish Community Hub highlighted several challenges faced by older Polish residents in Ipswich, including language barriers and technology. They say language barriers and limited English proficiency fuels social isolation and makes tasks like using public transportation and participating in social activities harder for people. They emphasise the importance of ensuring older Polish residents feel respected and included both in the broader community and the Polish community for their overall health and wellbeing.

“...Need to recognise that for people where English is not their first language, they do not use the same sources for information as those who are British for example they won’t go to the BBC news website. They will go to their own country’s media sites. Digital enables people to be able to do this in a way that wasn’t available in the past. It helps to keep the connections with home and their own cultures.”

What are Suffolk survey respondents doing to help them to age well?

There were 380 responses to this question on the survey. The top three themes were:

1. **Physical exercise**
2. **Social opportunities**
3. **Giving back to the community**



“We cycle and do not own a car. U.K. is car dependent on the whole with the consequences of under active bodies. Obesity levels are rising with overweight bodies putting stress on joints and the essential muscles not used properly...Research suggests that frequent exercise such as cycling will improve health and extend life years up to 20 years... Older people can really gain from cycling, even electric bikes if effort is hard. So can all ages.”

“Trying hard to keep my brain active and engaged, and keeping up to date with technology as much as we can. One of my hobbies is learning sign language; I am a member of the local women’s Institute, and welcome being involved with people and helping where I can.”

“I exercise, eat well by cooking from scratch and drink lots of water!”

“I have taken on a Co-Chair of governor’s role and attended an introduction to Nordic pole walking. There have also been opportunities to help clear the local churchyard. However, despite being of retirement age, I still work full-time and care for grandchildren so opportunities to take part in some of the activities etc. around is a bit of a challenge!”

“...I have joined several different clubs and groups that coexist in Hadleigh. A scrabble club that meets monthly, a community group that meets every Monday and a bereavement group that meets monthly, **U3A**, and several activity groups. I attend concerts held in the local churches and two lunch clubs held every month... All of this helps support the local community in Hadleigh and helps keep me occupied and not lonely.”

“I am member of the local model railway society meeting twice a week with other social events on an ad hoc basis. This group was very supportive when my wife had cancer surgery two years ago. I have hobbies at home including gardening and woodwork. My wife and I spend a lot of time helping with our six young grandchildren (2-7yrs) but are glad to hand them back.”

“Volunteer at MHHL - Martlesham Heath Householders Association, helping to maintain the heathland, create Wildflower areas and Bee cafe. Regularly attend a ‘Stretch’ class to help keep fit and meet with others.”

“I’m a volunteer singer and helper with a group of people with memory loss and their carers with Music In Our Bones. We recently had the opportunity to sing along with other choirs at Snape Maltings. This is twice a month in a community centre in Bury St Edmunds... I find singing very therapeutic and also helping people that wouldn’t get the chance to sing that same opportunity...”

“There is nothing within walking distance that is available to me.”

“Alongside many, many volunteers in the community, playing my part where I can. This includes: being a parish councillor, helping out community organisations to staff events and being a founding member of a community energy company which, amongst its aims is working to assist households to reduce their energy bills, increase their energy resilience and improve their carbon footprint...”

“I attend Old Felixstowe Parish Church weekly and the vicar set up a Bible Study Group for Carer’s in the congregation which really helped four of us get through very difficult times...”

“Radio amateur, talk daily with friends around the world. Day trips out.”

“Dealing with life’s problems, seems to take most of my time... Would love to paint and try various crafts. Like studying when possible (OU). Would also like to do some volunteering, ideally in science research.”

The Challenge Lab approach

As part of the development of the Annual Public Health Report, Public Health and Communities, in collaboration with the Integrated Care Academy, ran three Challenge Lab sessions in November 2024. Attendees represented a wide range of professions across the Suffolk system, including colleagues from Integrated Neighbourhood Teams, Adult Social Care, hospices, and the Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector. The sessions were held in Ipswich, West Suffolk, and Lowestoft.

The sessions were framed around the question: *“How can we enable the people and communities of Suffolk to thrive as they age, while fostering a supportive environment for all?”* Through these sessions, we explored the eight domains of the World Health Organisation’s Age-Friendly Communities framework.

Key Takeaways and Outcomes

The Suffolk Ageing Well Challenge Labs successfully cultivated a collaborative environment, bringing together a diverse group of change-makers. Everyone contributed to dynamic idea generation and solution-focused discussions. These Challenge Labs served not only as a series of workshops but also as a launchpad for developing impactful, realistic solutions and building a robust network of allies committed to transformative change. The idea-generation process showcased the wealth of opportunities to build on existing knowledge and infrastructure in Suffolk, while also exploring participants’ creative ambitions to think differently.

Overarching solution areas by Challenge Lab:

- Lowestoft**
- Community empowerment
 - Inclusivity
 - Collaboration
 - Intergenerational support
 - Flexible engagement
 - Leveraging technology to enhance social connectedness
 - Access to resources

- West Suffolk**
- Personalised care
 - Accessible services
 - Community collaboration
 - Innovative transport solutions
 - Inclusivity to support lifelong health and wellbeing

- Ipswich**
- Enhancing integrated services
 - Fostering collaboration across sectors
 - Improving access and communication for underserved populations
 - Leveraging community resources creatively
 - Promoting inclusivity and connectedness for better health and wellbeing

Looking Ahead

The Challenge Labs mark the beginning of an exciting journey, with insights gained, new connections formed, and collaborations strengthened.

Together, we are shaping a future where every generation in Suffolk can age with dignity, resilience, and purpose—empowered by innovation, collaboration, and a shared commitment to community wellbeing.



[Be part of it | Integrated Care Academy](#)

Following the identification of key challenges and asset mapping in Suffolk, stakeholders at the Challenge Labs developed approaches to help communities age well...

Drawing on their experiences, they proposed both ambitious and practical solutions. Ideas were pitched to the group, scored, and combined where appropriate to address gaps such as asset connections, communication, community networks, workforce integration, and data management. These discussions led to innovative solutions and future developments some of which are summarised below:

Lowestoft:

- **Community Health and Wellbeing Hubs:** Establish hubs with directories of local events, volunteer coordinators, spaces for service delivery, and links to health and community support.
- **Resident Panels:** Empower residents to allocate budgets for community services in partnership with providers, fostering collaboration over imposition.
- **Business Engagement for Pre-Retirement:** Support near-retirees to stay active and connected through workplace volunteering, enhancing wellbeing and community ties.
- **Engaging Armed Forces Skills:** Involve service personnel in supporting older adults, benefiting both groups.
- **Volunteering Timebank:** Flexible system where individuals contribute time or activities as they can.
- **Warm Handovers:** Train volunteers to connect people with local services through improved signposting and referrals.
- **Social Activities Platform:** Develop an app, website, and flyer to match individuals with activities using AI for tailored recommendations.
- **Social Connection "Dating" Agency:** Match like-minded older adults with shared interests to boost confidence, expand social circles, and reduce isolation through physical or digital platforms.
- **Collaborative Community Transport:** Offer round-robin pickup services to enhance social participation.
- **Rural Transport Hire:** Provide free or subsidised access to unused vehicles (e.g., school buses) for community group use.
- **Parish Council Toolkit:** Share proven initiatives like car clubs, time banks, and IT support to guide local councils in addressing community needs.
- **Mobile Leisure Sessions:** Bring trained instructors to rural areas to deliver active sessions in available community spaces.

West Suffolk:

- **"What is Important to You?" Model:** Streamline communication to ensure individuals share their story once.
- **Ageing Well Service Catalogue:** Central directory of services with referral criteria, pathways, and service descriptions.
- **Professional Networking Catalogue:** Connect professionals across Suffolk to share best practices regularly.
- **Specialised Healthcare Influence:** Deploy occupational therapists and professionals to guide housing and environmental planning.
- **Social Transport Pods:** Introduce programmable transport linked to housing, shopping, and local networks for accessible mobility.
- **Health Ownership Incentives:** Reward individuals and communities for proactive health behaviours to boost wellbeing.
- **Proactive Health Screening:** Offer GP-led screenings for long-term conditions, frailty, and specific health needs (incentivised).
- **Flexible Housing Design:** Develop modular housing that adapts to changing needs over a lifetime.
- **Ageing Well Clubs:** Establish hubs with multidisciplinary teams (e.g., therapists, social care) for social interaction, information, and health discussions.
- **Affordable Community Transport:** Enable bus pass acceptance for community transport to lower travel costs.
- **Unified Community Equipment Budget:** Consolidate health and social care funding for efficient resource management.
- **Digital Single Front Door:** Provide an accessible portal for health, wellbeing, and interactive digital tools, with training for users.
- **Demographic Data Hub:** Centralise data on underserved groups to inform research and address inequalities.
- **Community Co-operative:** Foster shared resources through volunteer-run initiatives (e.g. gardening) and a points-based system.
- **Universal Parking Permits:** Allow community staff to park freely when visiting patients, regardless of location.

Ipswich:

- **Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs):** Expand INTs to include housing, education, and VCFSE with shared systems.
- **Streamlined Referrals:** Simplify referral processes through better organisational integration to drive system improvements.
- **Age-Friendly Communities:** Build an accredited network of age-friendly communities across Suffolk.
- **Collaborative Cross-Authority Working:** Foster further collaboration between system partners to achieve shared goals.
- **Multi-Functional Services:** Offer services like GP clinics in libraries or gyms for greater accessibility.
- **Single Points of Contact:** Establish centralised support for health, wellbeing, and family needs via multiple communication channels.
- **Health Buses:** Combine initiatives like the Be Well Bus and Coffee Caravan to deliver health advice and social activities to rural areas.
- **Mobile Library Buses:** Expand their function to include additional services for rural communities.
- **Hyper-Local Communication:** Secure funding for parish magazines to support inclusion, especially for those in digital poverty.
- **Community Spirit Initiatives:** Launch schemes like "Know Your Neighbour" to build connectedness and communal living options for older adults.
- **Volunteer 'Buddy' Scheme:** Pair isolated individuals with volunteers for support and companionship.
- **Transport Mapping and Access:** Maintain up-to-date records of community transport and promote personalised funding for transport solutions.
- **Strategic Role Creation:** Identify and align action plans from Suffolk's strategies, ensuring measurable success.
- **Interactive Community Boards:** Use boards with rotating themes to gather and share community feedback.
- **Larger Funding Pots:** Focus on enhancing existing people-centred services over creating new ones.

Reflections on this year's report

The report clearly outlines the significant demographic shift we are experiencing and will continue to see over the next 20 years. This shift will bring both opportunities and challenges for Suffolk.

The recommendations over the following page are intentionally high-level at this point; I would like to co-produce the next steps with system partners.

This is because the scale of this change requires new ways of working and thinking, along with a corresponding effort towards preventive activities. It is important to recognise that we are not starting from scratch; Suffolk possesses significant assets that we need to build upon. The question is whether we are maximizing their impact on supporting healthy ageing - and what additional measures we can take in a financially sustainable manner.

When focusing on a specific age group, I am sometimes challenged about why we are prioritising one group over another, for example, adults versus children. It is important to recognise that as a system, we struggle with bandwidth, and it is therefore important to coalesce around a specific topic. Actions related to healthy ageing can support the wider population, such as improving community assets, sharing information, and community empowerment.

Further, ageing well is not a journey that *begins* in later life; it is shaped by the foundations laid from childhood, the environments that nurture us, and the communities we call home. Creating supportive, inclusive, and enriching surroundings that empower everyone to age well starts from the earliest stages of life.

I therefore present both recommendations and a challenge to the Suffolk system. Our recommendations need to be realistic and grounded in our current reality—there isn't an influx of new funding. However, the public sector is spending billions.

So...

- How can we use our levers and assets more effectively to support residents in ageing well?
- How do we empower communities and residents?

Let's use this opportunity to come together, think differently, and take practical steps to ensure everyone in Suffolk can age well. The actions we take today will shape the health and wellbeing of our communities for years to come.

1. **Make Healthy Ageing a Shared Priority**

Encourage the public, VCFSE, and private sectors in Suffolk to collectively prioritise healthy ageing over the next five years, using the Age-Friendly Cities and Communities framework to guide action.

2. **Co-produce a Menu of Interventions**

Utilise findings from reports (e.g., Healthwatch engagement work and Challenge Labs ideas) and local best practice to co-produce, with residents and partners, a detailed plan of interventions and actions, specifying:

- a. Stakeholders involved
- b. Resource needs (e.g., new funding, reprioritisation, or adaptation)
- c. Intervention details
- d. Timeframes (short-term wins, medium-term objectives, long-term goals)
- e. Anticipated impacts

3. **Embed Findings in Public Health and Community Strategies**

Adopt the report's findings as the framework for healthy ageing ambitions, with Public Health and Communities committing capacity to support implementation.

4. **Shift the Narrative Around Ageing**

Facilitate a broader conversation with Suffolk residents about ageing well, challenging negative stereotypes and promoting practical actions individuals can take to support healthy ageing.

5. **Develop a Research Programme on Healthy Ageing**

Partner with research institutions and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) to establish a research programme focused on healthy ageing in Suffolk and Norfolk, building on the area's vanguard status.

6. **Implement a Targeted Population Health Management (PHM) Approach**

Design a PHM programme targeting frailty, mid-life prevention, and healthy ageing to support intervention delivery and evaluate outcomes.

7. **Identify Economic Opportunities for Healthy Ageing**

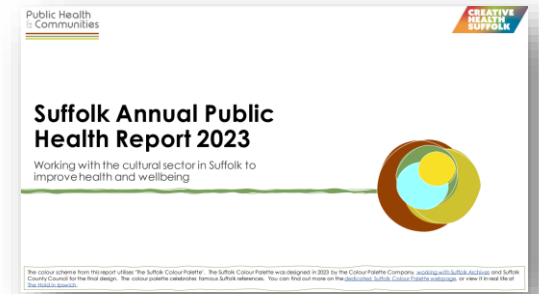
Commission work to identify local economic opportunities for businesses to provide services and support that enable Suffolk residents to age well.



What's happened since the 2023 Annual Public Health Report?

What's happened since the 2023 Annual Public Health Report?

- The 2023 Annual Public Health Report focused on the role the cultural sector has in supporting health and wellbeing, both directly and indirectly. There is a strong evidence base to show that cultural participation plays a significant role in reducing health inequalities and addressing health and wellbeing needs, both at a population and an individual level.
- There were specific ambitions within the report:
 - Suffolk becomes a creative health county; an area that recognises, values and invests in the creative sector to support health and wellbeing, to mitigate the adverse social determinants of health, tackle inequalities, and to generate equity.
 - Suffolk is a leader in this field. It pioneers work on evaluation and evidence and can clearly articulate the impact of its investment in the creative sector. The impact on the social determinants of health for the wider population will be clearly understood and will inform ongoing learning and professional development.
 - The Suffolk approach is efficient and effective; harnessing the voluntary and community sector and its public and statutory services such as libraries and archives and increasing engagement and participation in the creative sector across the county, especially amongst those in the areas of focus identified in Core20PLUS5.
 - Suffolk will establish a range of pathways for learning to be a creative health pioneer in both the cultural and health sector. We will have created high levels of employment for skilled practitioners in creative health. This will grow the creative economy, drive sustainable growth and raise Suffolk's profile as a creative, healthy place to live, work or visit.
- These ambitions were reinforced by targeted recommendations aiming to further support the vital role the cultural sector has in terms of health and wellbeing.



[View the 2023 report!](#)



Some key developments and achievements a year after launch:

- **SCC Culture Project Fund:** The £500k SCC Culture Project Fund, launched in September 2024, supports projects that align with Suffolk County Council's [objectives](#). Revised toolkits were developed with arts and culture organisations encouraged to incorporate these principles into their applications for funding.
- **Health and Care Collaboration:** Collaboration between the cultural sector and health and care systems has been strengthened through presentations, events, and partnerships, resulting in accessible resources and evaluation tools.
- **Cross-Border Partnerships:** Collaborative work with Norfolk and Suffolk Culture Board and Norfolk and Waveney ICB has expanded cross-border initiatives, integrating creative health into regional priorities and extending leadership roles to embed health perspectives.
- **Children, Young People, and Families:** A theatre project funded by Public Mental Health resources is enhancing young people's mental health and wellbeing through creative engagement in schools.
- **Innovation:** A dedicated fund has been allocated to support the development of innovative creative health initiatives across Suffolk.
- **Data and Intelligence:** Workshops held in June 2024 equipped cultural organisations with the skills to utilise data for planning and securing funding, engaging over 80 participants with positive feedback.
- **Evaluation:** An adapted creative health toolkit was made more accessible for small and medium organisations, included in funding applications, and shared with health partners to support evidence-based practice.