

Buckinghamshire

HEALTHY AGEING STRATEGY

2024 - 2029



FOREWORD

This strategy is our commitment to Buckinghamshire becoming more age friendly, which is a priority in the Buckinghamshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This means Buckinghamshire will be a place where the natural and built environments plus the approach of our organisations support people to live healthy, fulfilling, and independent lives for as long as possible – to ‘age well’.

The good news is Buckinghamshire residents generally live longer than the national average and stay in better health for longer too. But this good health is not spread evenly across the county. People living in our most deprived areas age faster and are diagnosed with a long-term condition on average 10 years earlier than in our least deprived areas. We want everyone to age well but ageing well doesn't only begin over the age of 65. Health in our middle age strongly influences our chances of staying well in our older years. People who have high blood pressure, are overweight or are physically inactive in mid-life have an increased risk of developing dementia or having a stroke later. Conversely adopting healthy behaviours can help people to maintain the capabilities that enable them to get the most out of life and do the things that they value. This strategy will therefore concentrate on those aged 40 and over to help give all our residents the best chance to age well.

This strategy has been produced by the Age Friendly Bucks Partnership – with representatives from across Buckinghamshire Council, the voluntary and community sector, and local NHS organisations. It has been informed by talking to our residents, which we will continue to do throughout the life of the strategy. We would like to thank everyone who helped to develop this strategy and who is keen to play their part in implementing it, most importantly our residents. Everyone has a role to play.

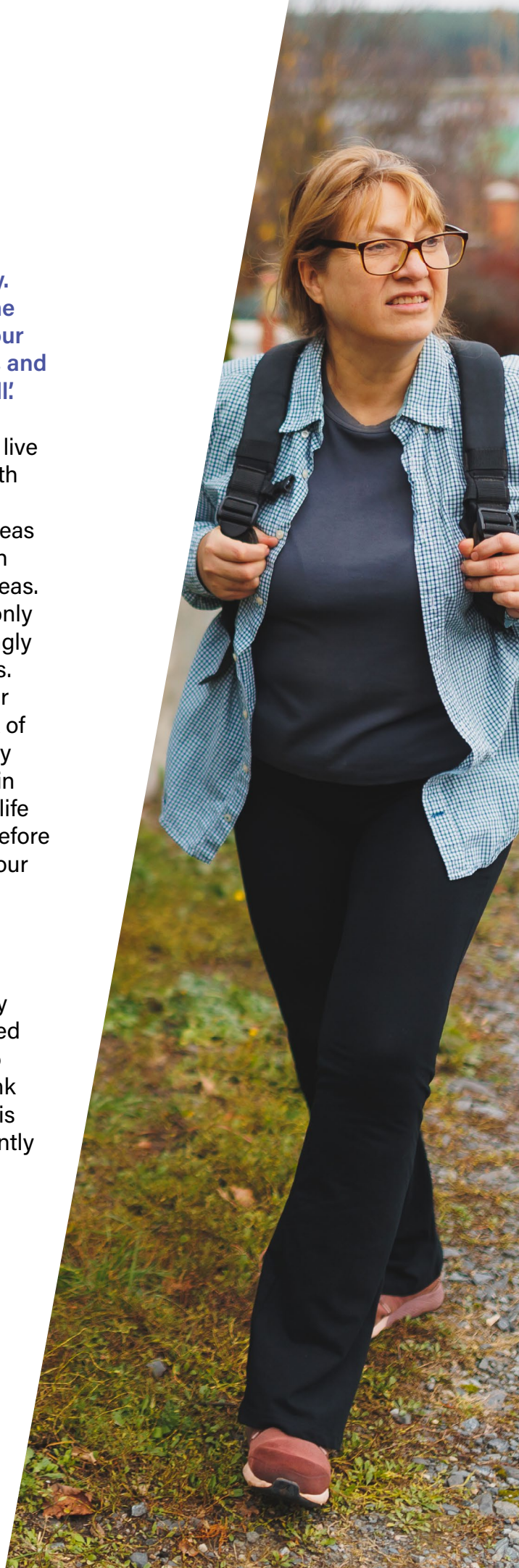
Please help us to implement this strategy and make Buckinghamshire a great place to age well.

Cllr Angela Macpherson

Chair, Age Friendly Bucks Partnership
Deputy Leader, Buckinghamshire Council
Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

Dr Jane O'Grady

Director of Public Health and Community Safety





PURPOSE

Healthy ageing means living a healthy and fulfilling life, being able to participate in activities and contribute to communities, be financially secure and live in suitable homes in safe and thriving communities. With the right policies, environments and support, people can age well and live independent and meaningful lives.

The purpose of this strategy is to create a shared vision for how Buckinghamshire can be a better place for older residents to live healthy and active later lives now and in the future. This strategy and action plan is for everyone who has a role to play in supporting healthy ageing, including residents, communities, the NHS, voluntary sector, and Council.

The actions delivered by this strategy will be created with our residents for our residents. The involvement of older people will be central to the delivery of this strategy's aims and objectives.

For this strategy we are focussing on people who are 40 years of age or older – this includes important years where building healthy behaviours and actions can help residents to enter their older years with greater mental and physical resilience and have better health. Yet some of the actions we take to become more age friendly will also benefit younger people. For example, improving the physical accessibility of our outdoor spaces for those using walking aids will also support people with disabilities of all ages and parents using prams or buggies.

There are three central outcome measures for this strategy which are reported with the overarching Health and Wellbeing Strategy:

1. People over age 65 spending more years of life in good health.
2. More people over age 65 being in work (increasing towards pre-pandemic levels).
3. Fewer adults feeling lonely often or some of the time.

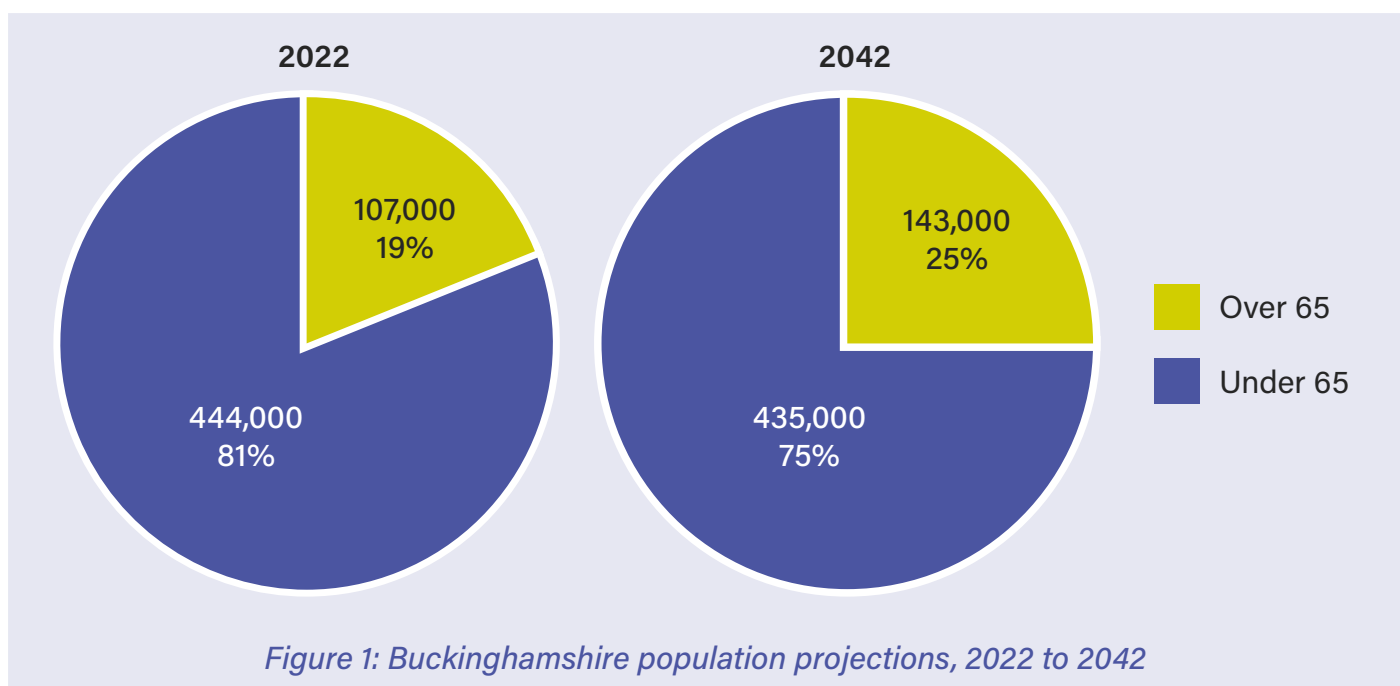
We recognise that these are broad outcome measures that will take time to turn around and also depend on factors outside of local control. Therefore, we will monitor the success of this strategy more closely through progress measures in our action plan.

BACKGROUND



Population projections suggest that over the next 20 years (2022-2042) the total population of Buckinghamshire will increase by 5% (26,132 more people). However, this net result reflects a much larger increase in older age groups, and a slight fall in younger age groups.

The population aged 65 years and over in Buckinghamshire is estimated to increase by 33% (34,944 more people) and the population aged 85 years and older to increase by 66% (10,884 more people) between 2022 and 2042 in Buckinghamshire.¹ This means that the next 20 years, those aged over 65 will increase from being 1 in 5 of our population (2022) to 1 in 4 of our population (2042) (Figure 1).



The good news is that people are living longer and the increase in the older population brings economic and societal opportunities. Older workers are vital to public services – 3.4 million key workers are aged over 50.² The age group with the most volunteers is the 65-74 year age group.³

However, these opportunities are most likely to be realised if older adults remain well and independent. Over the past 10 years of data (from 2009-11 to 2018-20⁴) life expectancy (how long people being born might expect to live if current death rates don't change) has risen in both men and women in Buckinghamshire (Table 1). However, healthy life expectancy (the number of years people might expect to live in good health) has instead fallen over this time in men and remained static in women.⁵ Therefore, the number of years of ill health has risen for both men and women in Buckinghamshire, and stands at over 15 years.

| | | Healthy life expectancy (years) | Total life expectancy (years) | Ill health (years) |
|---------|---------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Males | 2009-11 | 67.6 | 80.4 | 12.8 |
| | 2018-20 | 66.8 | 81.5 | 14.7 |
| Females | 2009-11 | 68.6 | 84.2 | 15.6 |
| | 2018-20 | 68.6 | 85.1 | 16.5 |

Table 1: Life expectancy at birth in Buckinghamshire, 2009-11 to 2018-20⁶

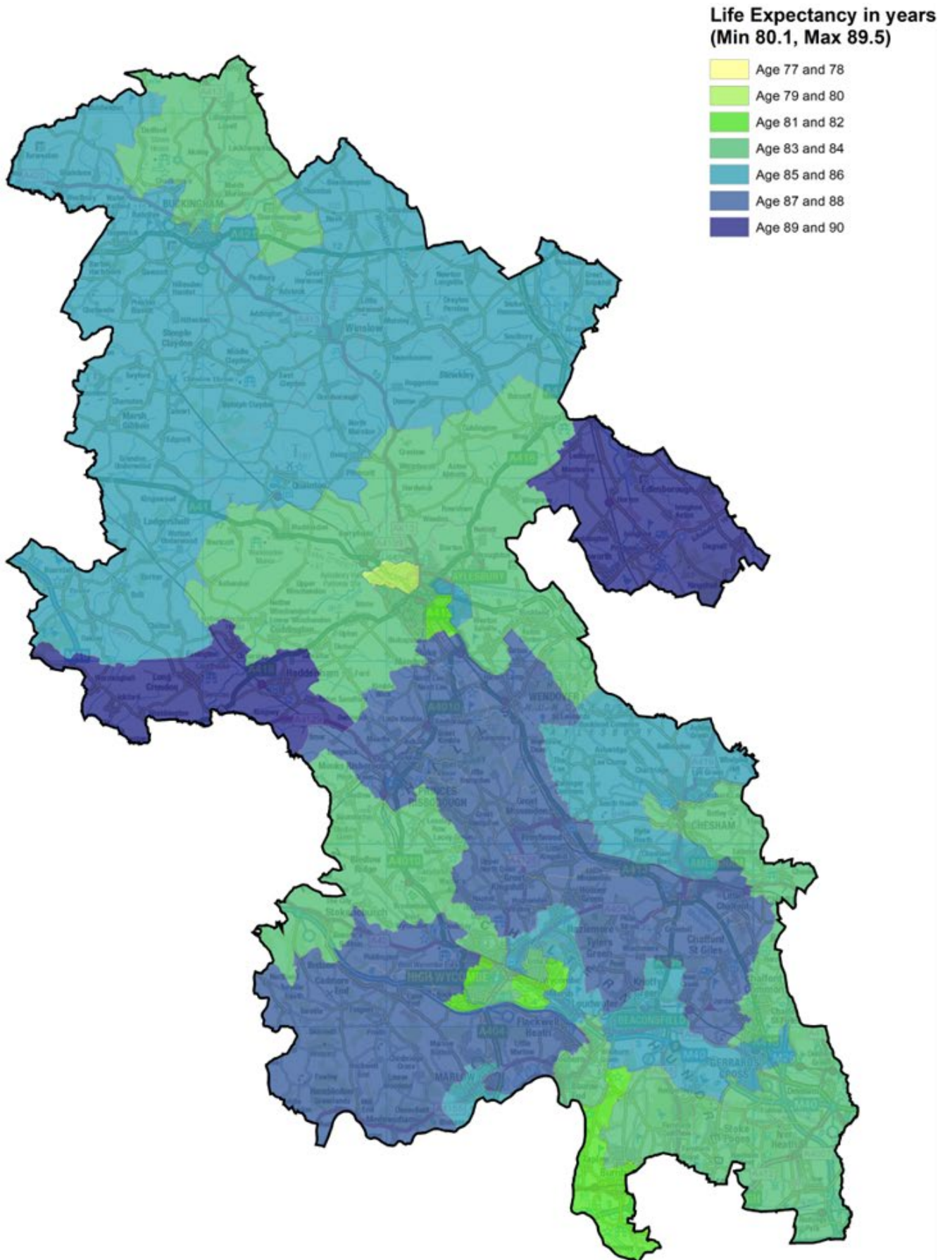
Unfortunately, the data shows significant inequalities. Those living in more deprived areas have a lower life expectancy and experience more years spent in ill health (Figure 2). For women, life expectancy ranges from 80.1 in Aylesbury North West ward to 89.5 in Bernwood ward (covering Haddenham, Long Crendon and nearby villages) – a gap of 9.4 years. For men, life expectancy ranges from 77.3 in the Wycombe ward of Booker, Cressex and Castlefield to 84.4 in Gerrards Cross – a gap of 7.1 years.

Most of the data presented above does not include the Covid pandemic, or only includes its initial period. However, the pandemic has had a variety of negative effects which are likely to impact on older people in particular:

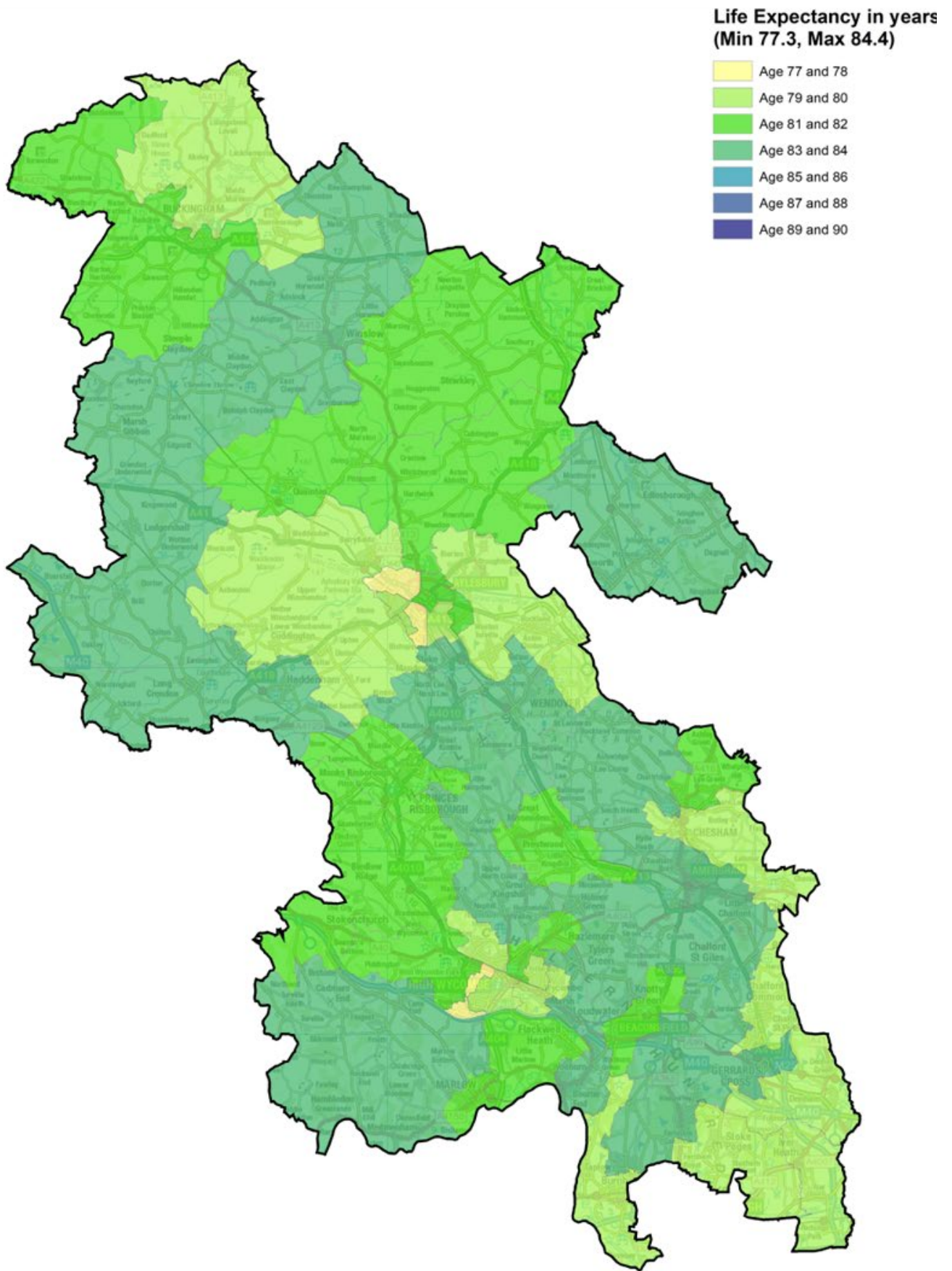
- 1. Physical activity rates reduced**, with the average duration of strength and balance activity in England falling from 126 (2019) to 77 (2020) minutes per week. This type of activity is essential to reduce the risk of falls, support mobility, and retain independence. The proportion of people being inactive worsened with more people doing no activity or less than 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week (32% inactive in 2020 compared to 27% inactive in the previous year).⁷
- 2. Loneliness has increased**, from 18% reporting feeling lonely sometimes or often in Buckinghamshire in 2019/20 to 24% in 2020/21.⁸ This is on a background of rising one-person households across the South East – projected to rise from 46% to 55% of over 65s living alone over the next 20 years.⁹
- 3. Employment of older adults has fallen.** The proportion of people aged 65 and over who were in employment has fallen from an average of 16% in the two years pre-Covid to 13% in 2021/22.¹⁰

Figure 2: Life expectancy at birth across Buckinghamshire by gender, 2016-20¹¹

Female life expectancy (at birth), 2016-20, by wards in Buckinghamshire



Male life expectancy (at birth), 2016-20, by wards in Buckinghamshire





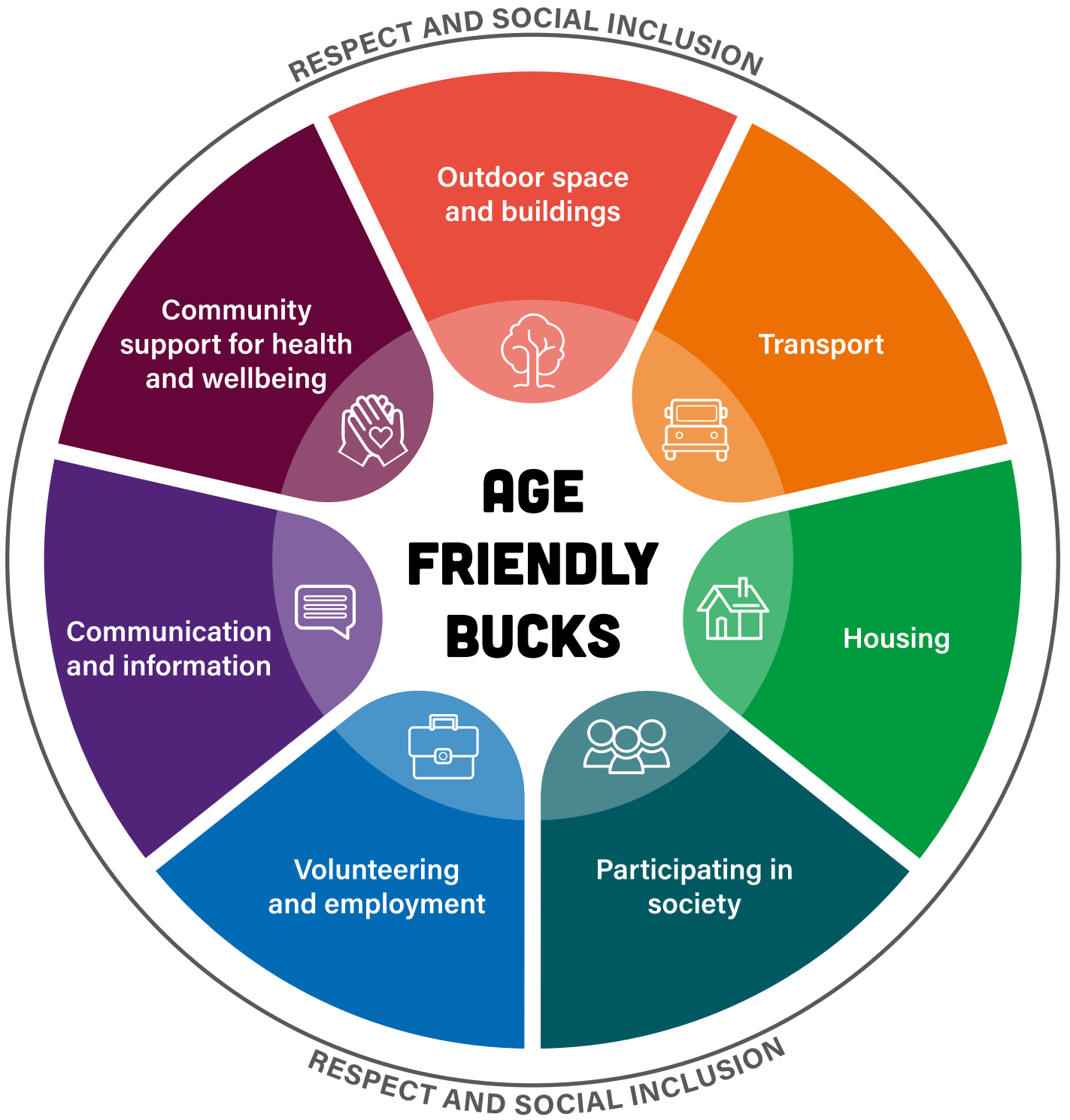
BECOMING MORE AGE FRIENDLY

Age friendly Buckinghamshire is based on the World Health Organization's evidence-based framework of the eight domains that support older people to live healthy and active lives.¹²

The eight domains are interconnected. For example, if people can travel, they can participate in social activities and connect more with friends and family, reducing isolation.

In Buckinghamshire, we will use seven of the domains as our key themes, with the eighth domain of respect and social inclusion running as a golden thread throughout our work (Figure 3)

Figure 3: Age friendly Buckinghamshire



Our aims across the age friendly Buckinghamshire themes:



Outdoor spaces and buildings

We will create high quality, accessible and social public spaces which are safe and help people to move around independently.
e.g. access to local and welcoming warm spaces.



Transport

We will promote accessible, affordable and appropriate travel options allowing people to access services they need.
e.g. age friendly active travel schemes.



Housing

We will support the improvement and development of accommodation for people to live safely and comfortably, and which can improve physical and mental health, wellbeing, and social connections.
e.g. age well design codes used in new build properties.



Participating in society

We will reduce and remove barriers to participation to foster engagement with activities and events which build a sense of belonging.
e.g. access to toilets so people feel confident and able to leave home and engage in activities.



Volunteering and employment

We will explore how to support older adults to continue in or re-enter employment in the face of falling older adult employment rates, as well as how to facilitate volunteering.
e.g. healthy retirement planning.¹³



Communication and information

We will build positive and accessible communications and campaigns, and challenge negative stereotypes and stigma.
e.g. local inclusive communications plan.



Community support for health and wellbeing

We will strengthen the health and wellbeing of communities and support the network of community-based groups.
e.g. libraries acting as a health and wellbeing hub in local communities.



Respect and social inclusion

All age friendly activities across our seven themes must support people from all backgrounds to age well, with respect and dignity.



AREAS FOR ACTION

Given the breadth of this work, to make progress achievable we will prioritise domains in turn rather than tackle all simultaneously.

To inform our prioritisation, and better understand the types of action that might best enable people to age well, we will be talking with residents and communities to hear their views throughout the life of the strategy.

This will concentrate on four key questions which all ask for free text responses to enable an unfiltered insight into residents' views:

1. What would make where you live a great place to age well?
2. What do you think your area does well to support people to age well?
3. What are the challenges to ageing well where you live?
4. What do you think would meet these challenges/better support people to age well?

An initial survey in summer 2023 received 228 responses. Responses were received from adults aged 40 to over 85, with 61-65 year olds the average age group.¹⁴ Four in ten respondents reported that they had a disability, impairment and/or long term health condition. Based on participants' postcodes, six in ten respondents were from rural areas and four in ten were from urban areas (predominantly Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham and therefore closely overlapping with our Opportunity Bucks areas).

Urban and rural participants raised different themes when responding to their local challenges to ageing well. Urban residents concentrated on outdoor spaces and buildings – with accessibility for walking and wheeling being the most important challenge at over 40% of the responses in this theme. Rural residents were concerned with transportation – chiefly bus availability.

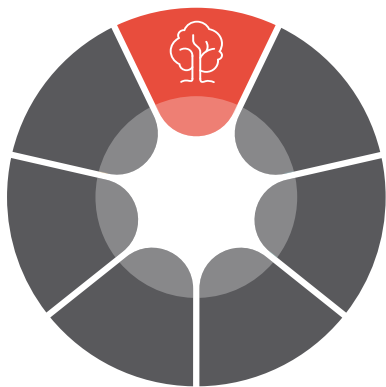
These findings mirror age friendly engagement across the country – in both small and large settings. Banbury, Oxfordshire, reported their most commonly raised themes to be community outdoor spaces, particularly pavement condition, followed by transportation.¹⁵ Age friendly Wales has made ensuring the natural and built environment is safe and age friendly their top priority, with a focus on reducing pavement parking.¹⁶ Research has found that people over the age of 60 represent 20% of the UK population, but only 8% of pedestrian activity, while accounting for 42% of pedestrian fatalities – with the maintenance of pavements, appropriateness of crossing facilities and state of road lighting cited as contributors.¹⁷

In the first year (2024) we will concentrate on two themes:



Participating in society

To tackle social isolation and loneliness which have been raised by local organisations working with older people and follows national recognition of an increase in the risk factors for loneliness among older people since the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁸ Social isolation has therefore already been agreed as a priority for the Buckinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Board.¹⁹



Outdoor spaces and buildings

Raised as the top concern for urban residents where we know life expectancy and healthy life expectancy is lower in our county. This theme is fundamental in enabling people to participate in society through the access to local amenities and community venues and the use of green spaces.²⁰

In later years the focus will shift to remaining themes, starting with transportation in year two (2025) as the top current concern for rural residents. Throughout the course of the strategy all areas will be addressed, but their order will be influenced by emerging issues and the changing priorities of our residents and partners.

We know that there is lots of good work already underway by a wide variety of stakeholders. This strategy will seek to build on and enhance this work, rather than duplicate it, when co-creating new actions with residents and partners. During our initial consultation survey there were reports of positive work across all themes, and it is important that we recognise these achievements.



IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

An action plan will underpin the strategy – capturing work and monitoring progress across all themes. The action plan will be reviewed quarterly and amended annually to reflect new priorities and opportunities. As new themes are tackled and projects are agreed extra progress measures will be added to our action plan.

An Age Friendly Bucks Partnership has been established to oversee the development and delivery of the strategy and support a system wide approach to delivery. It will form an umbrella for age friendly work – informed by several topic-specific strategies and groups (such as the Live Longer Better Alliance and the Physical Activity Strategy) already working to improve healthy ageing in Buckinghamshire. The Partnership will ensure emerging issues do not fall between the cracks. Membership includes senior representatives from partners including the Council, NHS, and voluntary sector, and it is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing who is also Deputy Leader of Buckinghamshire Council. This Partnership will report progress into the Buckinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Board annually.

A wider network of stakeholders, including residents, will also be established. This network will inform the priorities with insight and experience and will work together to create activities across our priority themes.

REFERENCES

- ¹ These projections use 2018-based estimations – the latest produced at a local authority level by the Office for National Statistics. They therefore do not include the direct impacts of the COVID pandemic, nor any changes to demographic behaviour since the pandemic.
- ² [Office for National Statistics, 2020](#)
- ³ [Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2020](#)
- ⁴ This data includes 2020 so covers the early COVID-19 pandemic. Given the high number of excess deaths due to COVID-19, life expectancy fell in 2020 across the county.
- ⁵ [Productive Healthy Ageing Profile - Data - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](#)
- ⁶ [Buckinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Profile](#)
- ⁷ [Wider impacts of COVID-19 on physical activity, deconditioning and falls in older adults](#)
- ⁸ [Sport England - Active Lives](#)
- ⁹ [Local authority ageing statistics, household projections for older people - Office for National Statistics](#)
- ¹⁰ [Nomis](#)
- ¹¹ [Local Health - Office for Health Improvement and Disparities - Indicators: maps, data and charts](#)
- ¹² [The WHO Age-friendly Cities Framework](#)
- ¹³ Retirement planning can include helping people to reduce their hours and change careers which may enable them to stay working for longer, as well as facilitating a smoother and healthier transition into retirement.
- ¹⁴ Six responses were received by adults aged 30-40, however the comments they submitted were in alignment with the other 222 responses received and so were included in the analysis.
- ¹⁵ [Age Friendly Banbury Consultation](#)
- ¹⁶ [Age friendly Wales: our strategy for an ageing society](#)
- ¹⁷ Musselwhite, C & Haddad, H: Older people's travel and mobility needs. A reflection of a hierarchical model 10 years on. *Quality in Ageing and Older Adults*, 19(2), 87-105.
- ¹⁸ [Age UK, 2021 - Loneliness and Covid-19](#)
- ¹⁹ The [Health and Wellbeing Board](#) brings together partners from across a range of local organisations to understand and improve the health and wellbeing needs of the Buckinghamshire population, and encourage services to work in a more joined up way.
- ²⁰ [Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors: Research Findings](#)