

Walkability Assessment for Healthy Ageing

**Engage older people
in the design of their city**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Aim:

The Walkability Assessment for Healthy Ageing tool was developed to engage older people in gathering qualitative evidence on barriers to walkability in their local area.

Context:

The Knowledge Exchange, Spatial Analysis and Healthy Urban Environments (KESUE) Project at Queens University Belfast mapped a Real Walkable Route of all paths in Belfast. Using available NINIS data maps were produced to identify age-vulnerable areas of Belfast. An Age Vulnerability Index was developed identifying households in an area which comprised of single pensioner households with no access to a car, long term poor health and % age over 60 or 75. An atlas of maps were produced depicting age vulnerable areas across Belfast.

Process:

An assessment tool was developed and informed by WHO Checklist of Essential Features of Age-friendly Cities and existing walkability tools. Using the KESUE age-vulnerable maps an area of east Belfast and Belfast City Council parks were identified to pilot the tool. Groups were identified through the Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership and East Belfast Seniors Forum. A bottom-up participatory approach was used to engage participants, as recommended by the United Nations as a successful way of engaging older people.

The pilot project was conducted with Sydenham Court Supported Housing, Mullan Mews Support Housing, North Belfast Seniors Forum, Engage with Age, Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and The Health Education and Relaxation Therapy (HEART) project. A total of nine walks were carried out with 70 participants.

A 10 minute walk assessment was conducted on a route determined by the group, at their own pace including participants with all levels of mobility. Research around older people and physical activity has deemed 800m a crucial distance for walking and remaining active. Participants were given an opportunity to view the questionnaire and familiarise themselves with assessment criteria prior to taking the walk. Questionnaires were completed following the walk. A group discussion on positive aspects and challenges of the local built environment participants faced on a daily basis also informed the results. The group discussion allowed participants the opportunity to raise issues that had not been included in the questionnaire and proved very helpful.

The project highlights that creating a supportive environment can be achieved with relatively minor adjustments.



Promote **high quality and well maintained pavements**, free of obstructions



Promote consistent provision of **dropped kerbs and tactile paving**



Consistent provision and standard of **public toilets**



Engage with key agencies to ensure **appropriate signage in parks**



Engage older people in **design and planning provision of public seating**



Awareness on **fear of being out alone** both during the day and at night. Suggestions such as better street lighting, greater awareness to promote personal safety of older people



Identify opportunities to review **placement of pedestrian crossings and crossing times**

