



Ageing well together

Understanding older people's relationship with physical activity in Buckinghamshire

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Executive Summary

Through its Active Bucks Programme, the Public Health team at Bucks County Council commissioned Leap to develop customer insight into older adults and physical activity in Bucks. The outcome of this work is provided as a guide to local partners in how to support older people to become active in later life and reap the many benefits that physical activity brings.

Evidence shows that as we get older, we become less active. This isn't always due to age and physical ability. Often caring commitments increase and social attitudes to older people being active come into play.

The effects of ageing and the effects of loss of fitness are often confused. The sometimes drastic loss of ability that many older people experience is not an inevitable part of ageing. In fact, older people can increase their fitness level to that of an average person a decade younger by regular exercise¹.

Currently only one third of people aged 75 years and over are considered to be doing enough physical activity for it to benefit their health. Just over half of this age group are considered to be inactive². And as people are living longer, this audience is steadily growing in number. For example, currently 1 in 11 people in Buckinghamshire are aged 75 years and over (9%). By 2038 this will rise to 1 in 7 people (14%).

Active Bucks is an initiative that gets people moving and feeling great across the county. Always evolving, it is shaped by understanding people's relationships with physical activity and identifying how behaviours can be changed in a positive way.

To support Active Bucks' latest focus on older people, we spoke to a sample of residents. We asked what it would take for older people to become more physically active. In particular, we were keen to find out the best ways to communicate with this audience and learn the types of messages that would resonate.

Older people who took part in the research, wanted [something to look forward to](#) in their daily and weekly routines. [Socialising](#) with people over shared interests was the primary driver for taking part in an activity of any nature. Most were not looking for opportunities to be physically active but did feel the need to get out of the house on a daily basis.

Awareness that being physically active was good for you was high among the older people we spoke to, but many lacked a specific understanding of why it would be good for them personally. Those with health conditions or limited mobility needed to know more about how being physically active could help and manage their conditions. Importantly, they also

¹ BMJ 2017;359:j4609 doi: 10.1136/bmj.j4609 (Published 2017 October 17) Focus on physical activity can help avoid unnecessary social care. Scarlett McNally and colleagues.

² Sport England's Active Lives Wave 2, excluding gardening (downloaded June 2018) for Leap CSP area

needed to know how to exercise appropriately. Unless they'd previously tried it, many people simply weren't aware of how exercise can be adapted to accommodate limited mobility, such as seated exercise. And if they saw something advertised as such, they wouldn't really recognise it might be for them.

Some older people we spoke to understood first-hand the benefits physical activity could bring them but said they struggled to find appropriate provision. Working out if a class was right for them was a considerable challenge, that only the very keen pursued. They disliked being lumped together as 'over 50s' and wanted more specific targeted provision based not on age but on range of movement. [They wanted to know whether or not they were capable of doing it. And to make that decision, they need to know much more about what is involved.](#)

The less active people we spoke to were not looking for opportunities to be active, nor were they likely to be in the near future. They would however, be interested in 'having a go' with their friends in the comfort and security of their existing groups. In this way they felt they would avoid the embarrassment of 'being no good at it' and could enjoy the fun atmosphere it would create by giving it a go and laughing together.

On the whole, the older people we spoke to were generally engaged in their community. They took pride in describing themselves as busy people with busy lives. This appeared to be the ideal. Any communications campaigns should build on this ideal with messages that reinforce its perception. When several messages were tested, it was those along the lines of '[Restful retirement? No thanks!](#)' that resonated with the older people we spoke to.

[Overarching recommendations](#)

Within the report there is a list of 'What needs to change?' under each section of findings. These outline recommendations aimed at supporting physical activity behaviour change in older people across Buckinghamshire. The following are a set of overarching recommendations, drawn from the detailed findings.

1. There is a whole systems approach to ensuring older people hear consistent and personal messages about how being physically active can enhance social opportunities, help manage health conditions and generally lift mood.
2. Communication campaigns to support physical activity opportunities to portray the busy lifestyle of an active older person, with particular focus on social and fun elements, creating a sense of something to look forward to.
3. To enable older people to easily understand that physical activity opportunities are appropriate for them:
 - a. target provision by range of movement rather than age
 - b. reassure older people they are capable of doing it by giving ample information and description.

4. Funding and delivery planning to take a more flexible approach to measuring outputs to allow for more creative approaches to meeting the needs of older people who are less active.
 - a. For example, building brief tasters of physical activity into a pastime that older people already enjoy would be a way to help older people realise that they have the capability. If, while doing the exercise they are having fun, socialising with people they are already comfortable with, and hopefully beginning to feel improved wellbeing, then this should improve their motivation. It is only at this point that they may become interested in the further opportunities around them. Or indeed, bespoke opportunities could be created on the back of these tasters. But this process, with this target group, needs time to build slowly before it can be measured and a switch to more outcome focused measurement might better align with a more flexible approach.

Introduction

Active Bucks is a public health funded physical activity initiative. The latest phase of the initiative includes a project being delivered by Leap, the county sport and activity partnership for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, which focuses on activities for older adults across the county.

To help inform the older adult delivery, and inform partners' current and future delivery and communication campaigns, Press Red, a physical activity consultancy, was asked to collect insight with older adults across the county via consultation.

Aims of the consultation

- To gather insight that informs the messaging of an older people's physical activity campaign.
- To gather insight to understand the barriers and enablers of physical activity lifestyles in older people and the types of interventions that appeal.
- To test some messages and/or types of interventions with the target audience.
- To produce an insight report that would inform the current and future older adult activity across the county.

Target audiences

Older residents of Buckinghamshire who are:

- Aged 65 years and over
- Currently inactive or who have until recently led an inactive lifestyle
- Representative of Buckinghamshire's older people population.

Consultation methods

A mix of consultation techniques was used to suit the situation, setting and needs of the individual. These included one-to-one informal interviews through to structured focus groups.

Consultees

The following table gives details of those groups who took part in the consultation. Groups were identified and recruited by the Leap.

Date	Group and consultation method	Consultee demographics
14 th December 2017	Warren Court Retirement Housing Coffee morning for residents Group discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group of approx.. 13 residents • 3 male, 10 female • Approx 8 females and 2 males were active in the discussion • Ages ranged from late 70s through to early 90s
14 th December 2017	Beaconsfield Library One-to-one discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 male and 1 female • Both aged in 80s
14 th December 2017	Iver Heath Library discussion group Group discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 females • Ages ranged from late 60s to early 90s • Majority were 70s
13 th February 2018	U3A focus group Group discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 females, 1 male • Ages late 60s to early 80s.
13 th February 2018	Men in Sheds, Winslow One-to-one discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 males, plus 2 (male) leaders • Ages late 60s to early 80s.
9 th March 2018	Kingshill coffee morning Small group discussions (very brief)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 people (70% female) • Approx ages 70s and 80s
9 th March 2018	Nordic walking group One-to-one discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 males, 4 females • Ages late 60s and 70s
17 th May 2018	Nordic walking group Message testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 male and 3 female aged late 60s
17 th May 2018	Men in Shed, Winslow Message testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 males, aged late 60s to early 80s
17 th May 2018	Iver Heath Library discussion group Message testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 females aged from 50s to 90

Limitations

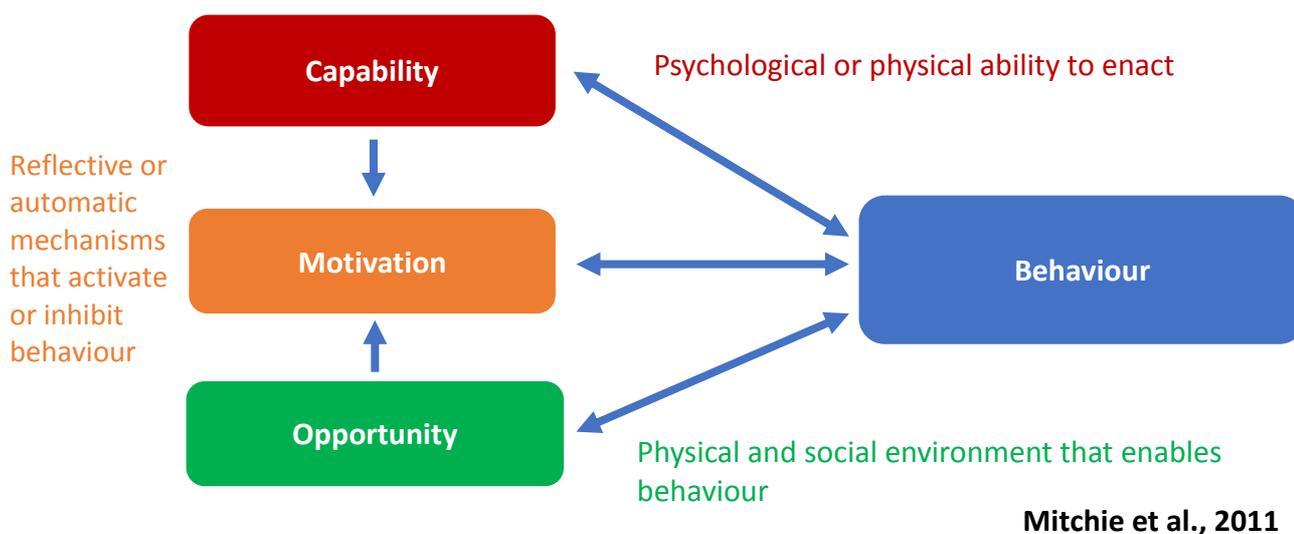
The following limitations relating to the research were identified:

- Input from consultees was not always equal, due to their limited time available or their lack of responsiveness to the questions
- All consultees were already engaged in some kind of community activity, but not necessarily physical activity related
- The sample size was relatively small.

Consultation findings: What needs to change?

The consultation findings have been drawn together to create a consistent picture of the physical activity behaviour of older people in Buckinghamshire and the factors influencing it. The findings are presented using the COM-B model³ (shown below) to understand behaviour change in order to answer the question: **What would it take for older people to become more physically active?**

The COM-B model



³ Michie et al., 2011 <http://www.behaviourchangewheel.com>

Capability

Know more about why being physically active is important

All consultees were able to describe what physical activity meant to them. They used phrases such as *'getting the heart rate going'*, *'moving around, getting your heart going'*, *'anything that gets you moving'*. Many consultees described it in terms of a type of physical activity. Significantly, this was nearly always **gardening** or **walking**.

Consultees were asked if they consciously thought about how much they moved every day and conversely, how much time they spent sitting. The majority of consultees did not think about how much time they spent moving each day, but it was clear that some were conscious that they did spend a lot of time sitting. *'I sit a lot', 'I do sit down a lot', 'I'm consciously aware I need to move but that's not the same as getting out and about'*.

Consultees were asked whether anyone was talking to them about the need to exercise. The vast majority said no. Several mentioned that a doctor or clinic nurse now and then mentioned the need to exercise, but it was just one thing among many mentioned and nothing was done about it. It wasn't taken further.

"Whatever you go in for they (GP) say 'well it's your age'. It's like you're on your way out."
Iver Heath Library Discussion Group

What needs to change?

Older people need to hear consistent messages about the need to be active in later life and why this is important. They need to feel that these messages are directed at and relevant to them personally. Messages need to be repeated again and again through many different sources, including professional influencers such as health care workers. Pertinent messages include:

- Something is better than nothing
- It's never too late to start.
- Start small and build.
- Physical activity slows down the ageing process.

Overcome physical and mental limitations

Many consultees described health issues that they felt held them back. Some were worried that exercise would *'set off'* their health condition. There was also concern as to whether, gyms and class instructors were able to cater for their health needs.

There was a general sense that as you become older, you become more cautious. This relates to many different aspects of life but particularly to physical activity.

Those with no experience of an exercise class for older people had no understanding of how classes are adapted for those with restricted movement. They imagined a *'full-on'* class. They were unaware of seated exercise and what this meant.

As a result, they said they would either feel embarrassed to not be able to do the activity properly, or more likely, would think it is not appropriate to them and not go.

“It’s hard if you haven’t been doing it before”

Iver Heath Library discussion group participant

Male consultees stated that men liked physicality, but they were noticing among their peers that when physical ability starts to become restricted, those men were pulling back and becoming more withdrawn.

Older people already experiencing isolation are likely to present a greater challenge. Organisers shared how little success they have had with this group. Men in Sheds, who have great links with outreach organisations, repeated the same message. That once a person has withdrawn from the community, it is exceptionally hard to engage them in any activities.

“They won’t come out. We’ve tried to put things on for them, but they don’t turn up – they never come out.”

“Lonely people aren’t proactive”

Kingshill Coffee Morning participants

What needs to change?

Older people need to know more about **how** to be physically active in a way that is appropriate for any health conditions or limited mobility that they may have.

They also need to better understand how appropriate types of physical activity have, in many instances, been proven to help and manage their health conditions.

Opportunity

Have more money

The fact that they were *'living on a pension'* was at the forefront of all consultees' minds. The expense of taking part in activities was a major barrier for some consultees in Iver and Iver Heath. While a few described paying £5 for a weekly activity, others quickly responded that £20 per month was unaffordable for them.

Members of the U3A welcomed their pricing model as an affordable way to get involved in many different things. It consists of an annual membership (approx. £18) and low-level costs per each activity (approx. £1 or so). The U3A are able to maintain low level costs as all activities are run by the members, for the members, on a voluntary basis.

Elsewhere in the county, cost was not identified as a particular barrier, with consultees expecting to pay around £5 to £8 for an activity and even sometimes £10. However, when probed as to whether they would be able and willing to sustain paying this for a weekly or twice-weekly activity over the long-term, this became a pinch point when the costs were added up.

Consultees views on the costs of activities

What do activities currently cost?

- £6 for seated exercise class with tea & biscuits (St Peter's Hall Iver Heath)
- £5 for exercise class with sandwich afterwards (Everham)
- £5 an hour for sequence dancing (Ruislip)
- £4.50 Movers & Shakers (several churches)
- £18 annual membership and £1 per activity (U3A)

What's a reasonable cost to sustain an activity long-term?

- "£1" (Iver Heath)
- "£1-2" (Iver)
- "£5 for weekly activity" (Kingshill)
- "A couple of pounds" (Iver)
- "£5-10 but I might not keep going at £10" (Beaconsfield)
- "Trouble is I'm better off some weeks than others" (Iver Heath)
- "But think if you go for a cup of coffee – that's £2.50" (Beaconsfield)

A pay-as-you-go pricing structure was the most popular. Just one person preferred

payment in advance for a block of sessions as she felt this motivated her to attend.

What needs to change?

Financial incentives would offer older people a way to increase and sustain their physical activity behaviour, particularly in the more deprived parts of the county.

Examples include:

- Vouchers to try something new. Perhaps the first trial session is free and the following five are at a reduced rate.
- Gym membership reductions following referral from a GP.
- Two people stated that if the council were really behind this agenda they should fund access to local authority gyms for older people, as in the long run it will save them money.
- Elsewhere in the country, councils are experimenting with free off-peak leisure centre membership for target groups. But this is only relevant if people can get to them easily.

Have the right offer available

Don't label us all as 'over 50s'. There was an awareness that activities for older people were generally labelled as for over 50s, but consultees thought that this was too-wide-a category. A large proportion of consultees were in their 80s and did not feel that an over 50s offer was relevant to them. It was not necessarily the age that was the barrier but knowing that the activity was appropriate for their level of mobility.

Off-putting names was also a factor. One group discussed Zumba Gold (Gold meaning it was for older people and gentler); whereas the group felt "Gold" made it sound extra strenuous. Similarly, they felt that "Sprinters" a leisure centre in Prestwood, sounded as if it was for the fast and furious and very demanding.

Beginners should mean beginners. Similarly, they felt that '*beginners*' classes were not always that. They often had participants who perhaps were once beginners but had remained in the class. This was particularly relevant for activities such as Pilates and yoga, where body position was crucial. The impact was that it made newcomers feel intimidated that they did not know the correct moves.

Not being able to see the instructor. With poor eyesight a common issue among older people, being able to see the instructor clearly was also a highlighted issue. One man explained how awkward he had felt in a yoga class full of women as he'd had to stare at other women participants in order to follow the moves, as he couldn't see the instructor clearly. He did not return to that class.

What would I be doing? For those not used to exercise, yoga and Pilates sounded appealing in that they associated them with gentle exercise. But they wanted to know a lot more about what they involved and how suitable they might be. They needed someone to explain what they would be doing. This group are unlikely to be proactive and find out for themselves.

Daylight hours only. All participants agreed that daylight hours were the only time to put on classes in the community, remembering that daylight hours are much shorter in the winter compared to the summer. There was no preference for morning or afternoon. While there were a few examples of people heading out to evening classes, they were a very small minority and always drivers.

Difficulty finding something appropriate. Those consultees who had previous experience of taking part in community-based exercise, described how difficult it was to find something suitable. This was particularly relevant to people whose classes had closed, disbanded and lost funding. They found it difficult to find a replacement. This was a common thread, showing the disruption to physical activity behaviour that short term funded projects can have on this age group.

What needs to change?

Opportunities for older people need to feel more relevant. They should be targeted more specifically rather than with a generic 'over 50s' label. The age is less relevant than a description of who it is for, such as 'gentle exercise for people with restricted movement'.

Offer small groups where instructors can discuss an individual's specific health needs, including poor eyesight, so that they can be responsive in their instruction. Treating everyone as beginners.

Have it more easily accessible

Getting about. Transport was a particular issue in Iver and Iver Heath, where the vast majority of consultees did not drive. They described a poor and expensive public transport system that had been subject to cuts and that did not connect well with the rest of the county.

"Public transport is terrible and costs a fortune."

Warren Court resident

Elsewhere, the majority of consultees drove, but they acknowledged that if they were to be without a car, this would make life very difficult. *'You need a car to live here'* was a common response. **The point at which a resident stops driving is an important milestone.**

"Since I've stopped driving I have felt more isolated. More lonely."

Kingshill Coffee Morning attendee

Not knowing what is available. Even within relatively tight-knit groups of consultees, the levels of knowledge about local community-based activities varied hugely. People did not seem to talk about and share other activities that they did. For example, during the Iver Heath consultation, group members discovered local exercise classes that they had no idea were running. The exception to this was the U3A group, where discussion about what other U3A activities you did was a standard part of small talk. One couple at the U3A group raised

the fact that assisted gym membership was available in the county via GP or rehabilitation referrals. The rest of the group were unaware of this.

Keep it local. All consultees wanted locally based activities. For those in Iver Heath who were less likely to drive, this meant within Iver Heath itself (the village hall or St Peter's Centre were mentioned). They had to feel that they had the strength to walk to the activity, take part in the activity and then walk back again. Several described the trip to Everham as too far because of this.

"It's all very well talking about it, but if it's not on your doorstep, really, you won't go to it."

Iver Heath Library discussion group

Although drivers were prepared to go further afield, they too still want something locally based. The only exception was if they were seeking out something specific that they wanted to do, such as Nordic Walking.

The residents of Warren Court, need provision to be brought to them within their centre. For various health and cost reasons they are not prepared or able to travel.

Complicated booking systems. Another related issue raised by several consultees was leisure centre booking systems and the need to go online at a precise time to be able to book in advance for a popular class. The classes sold out within moments leaving disappointed customers, who quickly lost motivation to continue the battle of the booking system. This appeared to be particularly relevant to Pilates.

What needs to change?

Take exercise to them. With travel becoming a greater barrier as people age, physical activity provision will increasingly need to be located in very local spaces. Organisers will need to reach out into those communities to find potential participants as they are unlikely to come forward of their own volition.

By bringing exercise to local venues, it has the double benefit of avoiding the need to travel and also letting older people see that more people around them are being active. Making being active the new norm for older people is the goal.

Finding where older people are already gathering and offering to tag physical activity into their programme makes sense. It won't be easy, as these groups are not looking for physical activity and so the methods of persuasion will need to be sensitive and flexible for both the participants and their existing group leaders. Finding common ground and shared outcomes will be necessary to persuade partner organisations of the benefits of this approach.

Offering tasters whereby instructors go to the group and run a 5-10-minute light fun session with them would be one way to introduce this slowly. For example, the Iver Heath Library Discussion Group talked about having a seated exercise session instead of a knitting session one week, so that they could all experience what it was like.

Build on what they already enjoy. Aside from physical activities, the pastimes, that consultees took part in and enjoyed were:

Reading	Scrabble	Travelling
Craft	Computer	Painting and decorating
Cooking	Singing	Photography
Knitting	Ukulele	Watching TV
Going to the shops	Going to the garden centre	Massage and reflexology
Lunch club	Attending talks	Making things with wood
DIY	Working with hands	Writing

Use the channels they use. There needs to be more local promotion of what's on offer. The following is a list of where older people said they looked to find out about local activities.

Village and or Parish magazines were the most popular source of information to find out what's on. They were a trusted source that when probed, consultees said they read them 'from cover to cover'. They described listings of activities which were useful and also said that they looked at adverts as they were all for local things. Iver Heath was the only place where other sources of information were higher up the list.

Internet searches were widely used, either by the consultee themselves or by their partner. They would typically search for their location followed by the name of the activity sought.

Notice boards were used. Particularly if the leaflets were updated regularly. Consultees said it was easy to spot when something new had been added. Locations included:

- Libraries
- Post Office
- Local supermarkets (CO-OP, Spa)
- Community centres
- GP surgeries (although many commented that these tended to be more health-related notices than activities).

Other information sources included:

- Library (but you have to ask to see the book so it's a bit hidden)
- Local newspapers (in the editorial section)
- Leisure centre sites
- Patient Support Groups
- Through other organisations
- Going to public events where local organisations are represented
- Doctor referrals.

Things through the door were not widely taken notice of. The perception was that they were usually very expensive.

No consultees seemed familiar with or used discount vouchers.

However, over all of the above, **word of mouth** was the **single most effective way** of getting information to the consultees. Again, this prompts the need for greater outreach work in communities.

Investigate local partnerships: a few that came up in consultation...

Consultees mentioned that while Weightwatchers talk about walking, they don't actually do it in the group. There is possibly room to explore linking a walking group with existing Weightwatchers groups and use of pedometers.

Over 60s Health Checks make referrals to Weightwatchers (who then make the offer of a discounted Fitbit). Is there scope to get these Health Checks to refer to Active Bucks and offer a similar discounted wearable?

U3A are only able to offer activities where an existing member has the skill base to lead the activity. They are not allowed to pay for instructors. This is a frustration for many members as they would like a wider scope of activities. U3A are however, very open to advertising opportunities put on by other local organisations. Mindfulness was a particular area of interest, which could easily incorporate physical activity.

Many of the men (particularly those at Men in Sheds) were members of the Lions, Rotary or Masons. Some of these groups have their own physical activity opportunities, for example the Lions had a walking group. Could this be expanded upon?

Have more triggers to prompt

Visual images of physical activity. The images used to advertise physical activity were a common discussion point and were often a turn-off for many consultees.

"It's all tight lycra. If you're a bit overweight and you want to do a bit of exercise, do you really want to put on tight lycra? A lot of people are put off by that, whenever they see pictures of people doing exercise – to advertise it. They are all stick thin and look like the last thing they need to do is go to the gym."

Nordic Walking Group participant

Something to look forward to. One phrase that kept reoccurring during the consultations was that consultees wanted 'something to look forward to'. The socialising, having fun, gaining health benefits and catching up with news were all elements of this notion. It kept the spirits up, particularly during long dull days with little activity.

"to know you are going to do something tomorrow – looking forward to something"

U3A consultee

What needs to change?

Get better at describing and visualising offers. Consultees felt that advertising and communications could be more effective. By this they meant:

- Portraying a ‘real’ image of older people exercising by including photos of local older people in their own (ordinary) clothes
- Showing the activity that they are doing clearly
- Clearly state that it is for people with restricted movement and/or age 75+ for example
- Where possible include a video clip – they would be looking to see what people are wearing, what positions they are in, the shapes of people, whether it’s all women
- Describing the activity – Yoga for example – they want to know how it works and what they will be doing
- If the activity helps with a particular condition, i.e. Pilates helps back pain etc.
- Include a phone number to talk to the instructor/leader. Consultees preferred to speak to someone before attending a new activity to be able to ask questions and to ‘hear their voice’. They found this reassuring. They commented that it was very rare to find a phone number these days.
- Be clear that there is plenty of time for socialising and stress the fun side of taking part.

[Explore the role of wearable technologies as prompts.](#) Wearable technologies to monitor physical activity behaviour appear to be becoming more popular with this age group. Most of the Nordic Walking group were using them (albeit the more active of all the consultation groups). Many women were familiar with Fitbit as Weightwatchers offer a discounted price to buy one through them. Others thought that in an age when ‘people are permanently on their phones’ these types of technologies would appeal.

[Have more support from others](#)

Consultees spoke of the motivational power of having someone with you to try new things and to maintain a habit.

“But if I go with somebody I don’t get as tired as if I’m on my own.”

“It’s easier to embark on a group or activity if you’ve got someone with you – a friend. The rest may be a lot of boring old farts but if you’ve got your mate with you...”

“Get people started by going with friends, trying it out. They realise it’s not as bad as they thought it was”

“You try a bit harder”

Nearly all male consultees admitted that they would not have joined their activity had it not been for their wife. Even though many were interested in the activity, they said they would have been unlikely to make the first step had their wife not first said she was going to join.

What needs to change?

As wives are often the decision makers within retired couples (when it comes to how they spend time), incentivise them to bring their husbands along to activities, i.e. the wife goes free.

Explore delivery models that target existing community groups, as opposed to individuals, because the group members already have a sense of belonging, familiarity and structure.

This approach puts the group, rather than the activity at the centre, introducing them to activities that reflect their interests and concerns.

Build a network of volunteers to help facilitate access to physical activity opportunities alongside those of activity leaders. For example, volunteer drivers or car share volunteers or people to knock on doors and accompany an older person to an activity. Much of this happens already informally, but perhaps the focus could be switched to prioritising getting that person to be physically active.

Motivation

Feel that I want to (and need to) do it enough

Disinterested. Of those consultees who were not already physically active, a large proportion described themselves as disinterested in physical activity or too lazy to change their behaviour.

'It's boring', 'I've always been lazy', 'inertia', were typical responses. Others had a slightly more positive attitude but struggled to do anything to change their behaviour.

"You get it into your mind that you're too old, but you're not really"

"It's hard if you haven't been doing it before"

"You know that it's good for you and that if you do it you will feel better, but it's the motivation to do it that's hard"

Need to get out of the house. The majority of consultees were not driven by the need to be physically active. However, what was on their minds was the need to get out of the house. And the majority related movement to *'getting out'*.

"I have to go out somewhere or do something – get out of the door"

"I think it just drives you nuts when you are on your own and you don't go out. Sometimes you just sit there and sit there and you're just looking at the clock. And you're waiting for the night time to come and in the end you just make yourself tired."

Iver Heath Library Discussion Group Participant

"I think on the days that I don't go out I think - it's terrible, I've done nothing today. I mean you're doing things indoors but it's not the same as getting out and about."

Iver Heath Library Discussion Group Participant

A large number of consultees described themselves as *'always on the go', 'I don't sit down until 5pm'*, but again this was more often than not, related to getting out of the house rather than being physically active.

Socialising is the number one motivator. Across a wide spectrum of activities, it was always the draw of meeting people that attracted older people to community-based activities and that also kept them coming back.

Consultees described how they had met and made good friends with fellow attendees. More often than not, this meant meeting new people.

"For personal wellbeing – the social side is really important."

"What would make me step in there is meeting people"

Beaconsfield Library consultee

This was exactly the same for physical activity. The lure of meeting people was more important than the other benefits of physical activity. And also, there was a strong view that doing the activity/exercise with other people made it much more enjoyable.

“Everyone’s friendly, it’s a chatty group. None of us knew each other before and now we get on great.”

“We’re socialising while we do it.”

Nordic Walking participant

Having fun is important. *‘It’s got to be fun’* was a common response as to how to engage consultees in more physical activity behaviour. They wanted something to take their mind off what they were doing and how tired they might be feeling.

“At the end of the day it’s got to be fun. You’re not going to repeat it again and again if it’s not fun.”

U3A consultee

Community spirit. Supporting something local that had been put on for them was a common motivator. Taking part in a village activity that allowed participants to ‘catch up with the news’ and ‘hear the local gossip’ was an important reason for many attending events such as Kingshill coffee morning.

Feeling good and health gains are the benefits felt from physical activity. Several consultees described how exercise had been part of their rehabilitation following illness, or operations. This included heart conditions, knee replacements, back pain and one woman who had completely thrown off Type 2 Diabetes with exercise.

The majority of consultees however described more general wellbeing benefits and *‘feeling good’*.

“It’s good for your soul.”

“Afterwards it makes you feel good”

“sorts your head out”

“gives us a little bit of oomph”

Men need something to do. Men in Sheds describe older men as needing *‘something to do’* and the male consultees confirmed this. A sense of achievement, no matter how big or small, was often the driving force behind male consultees physical activity behaviour. Whether that was *‘walking a mile every morning to get the paper’* or *‘spending a morning planting bulbs for a community project’* or *‘taking the neighbour’s dog for a walk’* there was nearly always a purpose behind it.

There was a sense from men themselves and from wives talking about their husbands, that men don’t like joining things.

“It wouldn’t cross my husband’s mind to find out what’s available. He doesn’t like joining groups”

U3A participant

“I’ve done classes when I was younger but I don’t like that sort of thing”

Men in Sheds

The golf club type stuff is not for me”

Men in Sheds

What needs to change?

Through our communications, we need to get individuals, who may not be interested in physical activity, to **believe it would be a good thing to do**. This will be made easier by drawing on their desire to have *‘something to look forward to’* and promoting offers as a community-centred opportunity to socialise and have some fun while exercising.

Physical activity offers for men will need to be designed to cater for the sense of purpose they want and at the same time bring a social setting to develop men’s personal networks.

Other ideas to attract men (who aren’t always great at joining-in) were:

- putting on men’s health talks through Patient Participation Groups,
- starting men only groups
- giving groups names that are more likely to attract men, such as *“sorting out men’s back problems instead of Pilates”*. U3A had started a discussion group called Moaners and Groaners as the traditional ‘discussion group’ was attracting all women.

Develop a habit of doing it

In terms of existing physical activity behaviour, **gardening and walking** were the most popular activities done regularly by consultees. Other physically active pastimes included:

- Yoga
- Pilates
- Dancing
- Cycling (included with a club, on an electric bike, and on own)
- Croquet
- Swimming
- Tai Chi

Gardening was mainly domestic gardening but also included allotments and small holdings. For the more enthusiastic, growing vegetables was a motivator. Consultees were generally split as to whether gardening was a pleasurable hobby or a necessity, but either way, a significant number spent time in the garden, mainly in the spring and summer months. A number did talk about gardening becoming a burden as they got older and were less able to

do all the tasks themselves and were in need of help. But they all agreed that the end result, of being able to sit in a nice garden was very pleasurable.

Walkers were split between those that walk as a means of active travel and those that enjoy it as a leisure activity. Walking was particularly popular among male consultees.

The top three activities requested (by women) were:

- Pilates, Yoga and chair-based activities
- Gentle fun dancing, Tai Chi exercise to music and aqua aerobics were also popular
- Swimming was mentioned several times but always followed up with some comment about the impact on hair as the 'faff' of swimming is always a barrier
- Other activities mentioned were: bowling, croquet, boule and mindfulness/healthy mind.

Men did not come forward with ideas.

Consultees described Winter as having a negative impact on their physical activity behaviour. The weather could stop them going out and activities such as gardening stopped. Autumn leaves on the pavement make it difficult for people to see the curb or uneven paths.

"If you've had weather like we've just had (snow), what can you do? You're frightened you're going to slip over on the path."

Iver Heath Library Discussion Group

What needs to change?

Prioritising support to help older people maintain physical activity habits during the Autumn and Winter months, when there is less to do in the garden and walks may be less appealing. With a natural drop-off of self-organised physical activity, there is scope for organised provision take over, provided it is local, social and fun, i.e. easy to access and the rewards outweigh the perceived effort of joining in.

"The long dull, dark evenings don't feel so bad if you've done something fun in the morning or have something to look forward to tomorrow. You rarely regret going out, but you might regret not going."

Beaconsfield Library consultee

Focus on...

As part of the consultation, questions were posed to see what impact three different life stages had on physical activity. The life stages were: retirement, bereavement and having grandchildren.

The impact of retirement on physical activity behaviour

Many consultees, particularly men, described how they had planned for retirement. Invariably these plans had evolved with time and it did not seem uncommon for men to have two bites at retirement because they 'got bored' the first time. For couples, retirement was seen as a time to 'do things together' and this was a common motivator for them taking part in activities.

Travel, DIY, gardening, walking, visiting places of interest were common goals for how to spend time in retirement. Many people wanted to expand their current interests and spend more time on them although a minority had taken up something completely new. Keeping mentally agile was probably seen as more of a priority than keeping physically agile.

Bigger plans were sometimes curtailed by the financial constraints of living on a pension, or health conditions but all in all, consultees found time to keep themselves busy. Being busy was the optimum rather than being physically active.

Younger women seemed to enjoy the newfound freedom of being without caring responsibilities or work and felt that it was now their time to do things. They were definitely more proactive than men in terms of taking up activities.

Male consultees did not appear to have the same well-formed local social circles that women did. This is possibly due to them working away from their locality and not having the time to invest in local relationships before.

"Most of my male friends are not in the location. So, most of my friends are female because they are my wife's social circle"

Nordic Walking group participant

"A lot of my friends worried about retirement – what they were going to do and how they were going to fill their time. But they've all filled their time perfectly well."

Beaconsfield Library consultee

The only time that getting fit or other references to physical activity behaviour were mentioned in relation to retirement plans were when consultees had experienced a health issue before retirement that they wanted to overcome.

The impact of bereavement on physical activity behaviour

Only one male consultee talked about bereavement. He had been widowed 2 years earlier and this had been a catalyst for him to join Men in Sheds, who he cited as helping him cope with such a difficult time. He had also joined a local croquet club at the same time, purely for the social connections and to provide him with something to do. So bereavement had the impact of making him more physically active but this was incidental as his need was to expand his social network.

The impact of being a grandparent on physical activity behaviour

Only five consultees mentioned grandchildren during the consultation. When prompted, others described 'never seeing the grandchildren' or that they were grown up. The four were all at the lower age range of the cohort, in their late 60s.

Two men (and their wives) were very involved in caring for their grandchildren. One had moved county to be closer and another regularly travelled for over 2 hours to provide childcare. Neither men linked physical activity to their ability to care for their grandchildren. Three women mentioned that either being fit for their grandchildren was a motivator or that being with grandchildren kept them fit.

Communication messages for physical activity opportunities

A number of different messages were discussed with consultees. The aim was to see which, if any, resonated with them. The emphasis was on which messages would make them act, i.e. join a community-based exercise class. These included:

- Health improvements
- Having more energy for grandchildren
- Able to keep independent for longer
- Social (meeting people) and fun aspects
- Showcasing personal achievement stories
- General wellbeing benefits
- Stressing exercises are suitable to age group and for people who haven't exercised for a long time – overcoming fear of injury.

While consultees felt that all of the above messages had some merit, there was only one that would make them act. That was **the opportunity to socialise**.

Given this and other findings from the consultation, the following are suggested as core messages for a future physical activity communication campaign. These are conceptual rather than precise wording.

Community-based physical activity opportunities are:

- Something to look forward to
- A chance to socialise and have fun while exercising
- Something to do together (for retired couples)

In terms of exercise itself:

- It's never too late to start
- Description of what the class involves
- Description of who it is for
- Images of real people, in groups, having fun, doing the exercise in 'normal' clothing
- Phone number and encouragement to speak to instructor beforehand

Subsequent to these findings, a number of potential messages were developed and tested with groups of older people that we had previously spoken to. The results of this message testing are given at Appendix 1.

Overarching recommendations

Within the report there is a list of 'What needs to change?' under each section of findings. These outline recommendations aimed at supporting physical activity behaviour change in older people across Buckinghamshire. The following are a set of overarching recommendations, drawn from the detailed findings.

1. There is a whole systems approach to ensuring older people hear consistent and personal messages about how being physically active can enhance social opportunities, help manage health conditions and generally lift mood.
2. Communication campaigns to support physical activity opportunities to portray the busy lifestyle of an active older person, with particular focus on social and fun elements, creating a sense of something to look forward to.
3. To enable older people to easily understand that physical activity opportunities are appropriate for them:
 - a. target provision by range of movement rather than age
 - b. reassure older people they are capable of doing it by giving ample information and description.
4. Funding and delivery planning to take a more flexible approach to measuring outputs to allow for more creative approaches to meeting the needs of older people who are less active.
 - a. For example, building brief tasters of physical activity into a pastime that older people already enjoy would be a way to help older people realise that they have the capability. If, while doing the exercise they are having fun, socialising with people they are already comfortable with, and hopefully beginning to feel improved wellbeing, then this should improve their motivation. It is only at this point that they may become interested in the further opportunities around them. Or indeed, bespoke opportunities could be created on the back of these tasters. But this process, with this target group, needs time to build slowly before it can be measured and a switch to more outcome focused measurement might better align with a more flexible approach.

By presenting these findings, we aim to harness the many opportunities that Buckinghamshire has to offer to inspire older people to become physically active in their communities. Some of our partners are experts in physical activity, some are not, but we aim to work together to promote the benefits that leading a physically active life can bring, as an essential part of health and wellbeing or simply for enjoyment.

To discuss anything within this report, or how to support older people in Buckinghamshire to become active in later life, please contact Leap on either 01296 585215 or info@leapwithus.org.uk

Appendix 1

Testing the campaign messages

Following on from the consultations, the findings were used by Leap to develop a series of communication messages to accompany a marketing campaign for older people. Four target audiences were chosen for this campaign:

- retired couples
- recently retired individuals
- men
- older (75+ years) adults.

These messages were tested on a several individuals who had taken part in the original consultation. They were:

- 1 man and 3 women in a Nordic walking group, aged late 60s
- 6 men at Men in Sheds, aged from late 60s to early 80s
- 12 women at a library discussion group, aged from 50s to 90

The consultees were shown a mock-up of a postcard with photograph and message and also a series of other suggested messages. Their feedback is given below.

Target audience: Retired couples



Test messages

A: I never knew quality time with my wife would involve so many new friends

B: Don't let her know how much I enjoy it!

C: It used to be her dragging me along but now I can't wait

D: She's always made my heart race, but not like this!

E: I never knew quality time with my wife would involve so many new friends

Nordic walkers (men and women)

- Could relate to all the messages. Found them amusing.
- Favourite was C 'dragging me along'.

Men in Sheds (men)

3 men

- Didn't get these messages. Their wives organise everything for them, but even so they didn't see the relevance of these messages, i.e. felt the message should be directed at their wives.

2 younger, more active men

- Favourite was C 'dragging me along'.

Library group (women)

Group 1

- Favourite was D 'heart race'.
- Liked the humour in it and the connection of heart racing to physical activity.
- Felt that a man would never say the things on the other messages.

Group 2

- None of the messages resonated with them. They felt they didn't have 'zing'.
- There were several comments about their husbands...
 - 'he doesn't want any new friends'
 - 'enjoy it? He only likes his own company'

Suggested message to use: It used to be her dragging me along but now I can't wait

Comments: This seemed to resonate well with couples particularly at the lower end of the age spectrum.

Target audience: **Recently retired**



Test messages

A: **Restful retirement...not if they have anything to do with it!**

B: **When did we find time for work?**

C: **Together we keep active (pets/grandchildren)**

D: **We do it to keep up with the grandchildren**

Nordic walkers

- Favourite was A 'restful retirement'.
- Commented that grandchildren can be an emotive issue as many grandparents have little or no contact with them.
- Suggested something like 'got to be fit for the annual visit of the grandchildren' to overcome this.

Library group (women)

Group 1

- Favourite was A 'restful retirement'.
- Second favourite was B 'time for work'.
- Felt C & D were a bit flat.

Group 2

- Favourite was B 'time for work'.
- Second favourite was A 'restful retirement' (although several commented that grandchildren had now grown up).
- Felt that grandchildren were better than pets in the photo as older people often can no longer look after pets.

Suggested message to use: **Restful retirement...not if they have anything to do with it!**

Comments: This seemed to resonate well across the age profile and with men and women.

Target Audience: **Men**



Test messages

- A: Who said you can't teach an old dog new tricks
- B: We're not ready for our pipe and slippers just yet
- C: Out with the boys
- D: We can organise ourselves
- E: Now we've earned that drink
- F: Restful retirement...no thanks

Nordic walkers

- Only 1 man in the group although the women did give their opinion

- Favourite was C 'boys'

Men in Sheds

Older man (81 years)

- Favourite was B 'pipe and slippers'.
- His second favourite was F 'restful retirement'.
- The other messages did not mean anything to him.

3 men (who described their wives as the person who organised everything for them)

- Favourite was B 'pipe and slippers'.
- Second favourite was C 'boys'.
- Suggestion that we need a message about men socialising.

2 men (slightly younger and more active than the other consultees at MIS)

- Favourite was F 'restful retirement'.
- Second favourite was E 'drink'.
- They didn't like C 'boys' as they felt it came across as a bit cliquey.
- They felt that B 'pipe and slippers' was aimed at a much older man.

Library group (women)

Group 1

- No men in this group but those with husbands at home gave their opinions.
- Favourite was F 'restful retirement' and this would work well with a photo of a dog as well as grandchildren.
- They didn't think men thought they needed to earn a drink (E), they would have it anyway
- Felt pipe and slippers (B) was a vanishing phrase. Suggested 'not ready to put feet up yet'.

Suggested message to use: [Restful retirement...no thanks!](#) for younger men and [We're not ready for our pipe and slippers just yet](#) for older men.

Comments: This was less clear cut and it will be important the photos used match the age profile chosen. It is also worth following up the suggestion of having a message to promote men socialising.

Target audience: Older adults aged 75 years +



Test messages

A: Keeping up with the local gossip

B: Getting out is the highlight of my week

C: Have you heard...

D: I didn't know I could still feel like this

Nordic walkers

- All of the group were too young to be included in this target audience.
- Favourite was B 'highlight' (but they were choosing for their parents rather than themselves).
- Felt it needed an image of men together socialising.
- Felt we should be promoting their shared interests rather than their shared age.
- There was a suggestion that women gossip and men put the world to rights.
- Pointed out negative associations with the word gossip.

Men in Sheds

Older man (81 years)

- None of these messages meant anything to him.

Library group (women)

Group 1

- No particular favourite but A 'gossip' could be worked on.
- Didn't like the word 'gossip' as felt it had nasty connotations.
- Prefer 'chat' or 'keeping up with the local news'.

- Or something about what's going on in the community.
- They felt B 'highlight' was only appropriate for the much older and more isolated.
- C 'have you heard' was ambiguous.
- D 'feel like this' was the right concept but the words weren't right.

Group 2

- Favourite was D 'feel like this'.
- Didn't like the word 'gossip'. Said 'chat' was better.
- Felt that while B 'highlight' may be true, they didn't think people would want to have their isolation pointed out.

Suggested message to use: No clear winner. Suggest that [Keeping up with the local gossip](#) is reworded.

Comments: Something along the lines of 'I look forward to it' could be used as this phrase was used by several consultees when discussing B 'highlight'.

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