

# greener and wiser

an older people's manifesto  
on the environment



written by the Greener and Wiser Taskforce

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### Green Alliance

Green Alliance is one of the UK's most influential environmental organisations. Our aim is to make environmental solutions a priority in British politics. We are an independent charity and work with representatives from the three main political parties, government, business and the NGO sector to encourage new ideas, facilitate dialogue and develop constructive solutions to environmental challenges. [www.green-alliance.org.uk](http://www.green-alliance.org.uk)

### Natural England

Natural England is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity that it brings. [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

### Age Concern and Help the Aged

Age Concern and Help the Aged is the interim name for a new organisation dedicated to improving the lives of older people. We aim to create a more inclusive society, better able to respond to the needs of an ageing population; to provide support and improve the products and services provided by others; to promote respect and dignity for older people; and to help them live life to the full.

### Acknowledgements

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# executive summary

## About the taskforce

The environment is often seen as an issue for young people, and the needs and views of older people are in danger of being ignored. This is why Age Concern and Help the Aged,<sup>1</sup> Green Alliance and Natural England joined together to create the Greener and Wiser taskforce.

Ten older people were recruited through an advertisement distributed by Help the Aged's networks. Members were selected to represent a range of backgrounds and areas of the country. Some were actively involved in green issues, others were not.

The taskforce met three times over a period of six months, helped by a professional facilitator. At the first meeting, they discussed the environmental issues that concerned them, and drew up a shortlist of topics to address. These topics were transport, climate change, waste, and involvement in decision making. The second meeting involved a dialogue between the taskforce and four green 'experts', from Marks and Spencer, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Friends of the Earth and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. In the light of this discussion, the group refined their ideas and began to work on some conclusions. At the third meeting, these conclusions and recommendations were discussed and a final set of recommendations agreed.

"This project is innovative and well thought of because older people do want to play a part in saving our planet." – Rene

## The taskforce's findings and recommendations

The taskforce produced a manifesto with two key aims. They wanted to increase the profile of older people in environmental decision-making and communication; and they wanted to address the more practical challenges that older people face in making greener choices.

They drew up a set of 'guiding principles' and some practical recommendations in three specific areas: transport, energy and climate change, and waste and recycling. These recommendations reflect some of the challenges that many older people face in becoming active environmental citizens. Some recommendations are below; the full set is in the main text.

## The guiding principles include:

- **Better communication is critical.** Older people often have strong networks within their communities and, with assistance, have great potential to act as environmental advisers. Links could also be built between older people and environmental education in schools, to the benefit of both sides.
- **Older people can be role models on green issues.** A high profile spokesperson for older people and the environment would help to reach out and spread the message.
- The taskforce wants a **greater role for older people in decision making about environmental issues**, not just on issues that are specific to older people. They suggest creating platforms for consulting older people on environmental issues in local authorities.
- Lastly, a **principle of interconnectedness should guide decision making.**

For example, out of town shops may lead to the closure of local shops and higher impact journeys, and older people then lose the health and social benefits of walking to local shops. These knock-on effects must be better thought through.

**Specific recommendations include:**

- **On transport**, the taskforce wants a greener and fairer transport system, with better public transport built into the design of new communities. They want fairer pricing, particularly for rail journeys, and stronger legislation to prevent higher-impact transport, such as larger cars, being developed and brought to market.
- **On energy and climate change**, the taskforce wants energy companies to develop green energy tariffs that are targeted at the needs of older people and enable them to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. They also want housing associations to show leadership in delivering energy efficiency and promoting green choices.
- **On waste and recycling**, the taskforce wants to reduce the amount of waste generated, not just increase recycling levels. They have recommendations for both retailers and local authorities. Retailers should provide clearer information about environmental choices and consider take-back schemes for reusable packaging. Local authorities should age proof recycling policies, to make sure older people can participate, and promote composting and re-use schemes.



## why commission a task force?

### A view from Age Concern and Help the Aged, Green Alliance and Natural England

Florence Lyons is proud of her neighbours' recycling record. In her street in Bury, near Manchester, it is easy to remember which day is recycling day, because Florence makes a point of putting her bag out first thing. "When the neighbours go to work they spot my bag and they do theirs. I feel good about that", she explains. Now in her eighties, Florence is also a proud member of her local youth group, and campaigns with them to improve their local area. She worries about too much development: "we should still have places where we can go and look at nature", she says.

As Florence demonstrates, older people are important participants in social and political life. There are 20 million people in the UK aged 50 or over, and this group contains many people like Florence who are actively involved in their community, and in promoting green issues. Yet the environment is seen as an issue for young people. So much green imagery centres around children, and environmental education focuses on schools. The environmental views and concerns of older people are in danger of being ignored.

"This has been a worthwhile experience to which I contributed with joy. I hope the outcome will raise the profile of older people's voices on an issue crucial to us all." – Annie

This is why Age Concern and Help the Aged, Green Alliance and Natural England joined forces to bring together this taskforce. A group of ten older people, including Florence, have worked together over a period of six months, to explore the challenges and opportunities for older people. The taskforce has developed recommendations about how older people can contribute to environmental improvement, and how central and local government can help them in their efforts. Although developed in isolation, many of their recommendations reflect those being put forward in wider debates on policy to do with older people and we will look to progress them with relevant organisations where appropriate.<sup>2</sup>

The recommendations contained in this manifesto have two key aims:

- To increase the profile of older people and their views in environmental decision making and communication; and
- To address the more practical challenges that older people face in making greener choices.

Green Alliance is keen to mobilise every voice possible in calling for political and public action to address climate change. Older people have been missing in this effort but the value of their contributions is not in doubt. Initiatives such as Nelson Mandela's Global Elders group, and the government's plans to significantly improve the ways they engage older people,<sup>3</sup> demonstrate the value of involving them in addressing society's challenges. Older people should not just be consulted on issues that they are traditionally associated with, such as healthcare, but on all issues that affect them and where they have something to offer.

Natural England believes that strong connections between people and the

natural environment help to create stronger communities and a healthy population. Older people, many of whom have more leisure time than other sections of the population, may use the natural environment for recreation, to improve health or for socialising. These interests may be developed through activities such as walking, gardening or bird watching or by volunteering for local conservation projects. The importance of the outdoor environment for improving health was emphasised in recent guidance from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence,<sup>4</sup> which encouraged GPs and community nurses to promote regular participation in local walking schemes as a way to improve mental wellbeing for older people.

Age Concern and Help the Aged aim to see older people living full and active lives. Being part of a local community, able to travel to nearby shops and services and to take part in local initiatives are a key part of this. They support the taskforce's recognition of the twin impacts that poor public transport provision can have on both the environment and older people's isolation. They also support their desire for older people to have more direct input into decisions that affect them and for them to lead active lives as environmental advocates within their communities.

The Greener and Wiser taskforce has developed a set of clear, targeted recommendations. They challenge both local and national government to recognise older people's potential to help address environmental problems. They also challenge government to put provisions in place to support older people in making greener choices. We look to government to recognise the opportunities reflected in these recommendations and to respond to the obstacles that they highlight.

Age should not be a barrier to being green. If the ideas and enthusiasm of this taskforce are even a partial reflection of older people overall, they represent an unmissable opportunity to support a 'new' generation in going green and to add a new voice to the environmental debate.



## ways of working

The Greener and Wiser taskforce worked together over a series of six months with three meetings in London, each of which lasted a day.

“At the first meeting I thought, what have I let myself in for? By the time it ended I thought how lucky I was. I’ll miss our noisy debates.”  
– Florence

### Recruiting the taskforce

The taskforce was recruited through Help the Aged’s networks using an advertisement asking for people interested in exploring the issues associated with older people and the environment. Applicants were asked to write a short statement about why they wanted to take part and about 30 people responded. Members were selected from a range of backgrounds, areas of the country and rural and urban areas, and had varying levels of prior interest in green issues. The members are profiled throughout the manifesto.

### Getting to know each other

The first taskforce meeting took place in September 2008. It was a chance for the group to get to know each other, the organisations involved and the meeting’s facilitator, Ann Finlayson. Prior to the meeting, taskforce members had set out the environmental issues of particular concern to them in a background interview. This list was shared at the first meeting and any extra issues added to it. The group then voted on the top four issues they wished to focus their work on. The ones they chose were:

- transport
- energy and climate change
- waste and recycling
- involvement in decision making

The group then discussed each of these issues in detail; identifying problems related to it, possible alternatives, and the areas where they needed more information.

### Talking to experts

At the second meeting in November 2008, the taskforce met experts on their four key issues. This was an opportunity for the taskforce to get their questions answered in order to inform their thinking and shape their ideas. In light of what they learnt, the group developed additional ideas and discussed the key themes coming out of the process.

The experts that the group spoke to were:

- Waste and recycling – Mark Caul, senior packaging technologist, Marks and Spencer
- Transport – Ralph Smyth, transport campaigner, Campaign to Protect Rural England
- Climate change – Nick Rau, renewables campaigner, Friends of the Earth
- Involvement in decision making – Philip Stamp, then sustainable production and consumption team, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

## Agreeing recommendations

Following the second meeting, Green Alliance collated all of the taskforce's thoughts and suggestions and, based on them, wrote a series of draft recommendations. The aim was for these to clearly convey the taskforce's ideas in ways that local and national government, the private and voluntary sectors can respond to and implement.

In their third meeting in January 2009 the taskforce worked through the draft recommendations, amending and adding new ones where appropriate. They also set out a short message they would each want to convey on older people and the environment. These are shared throughout this document. The taskforce agreed a clear set of recommendations which reflect the wider themes of their discussions and the practical aspects of ways in which older people can be assisted in making greener choices.

**“Lively, informative and sometimes frustrating meetings, but I wouldn't have missed it for anything!” – Stephen**





## the manifesto

The full Greener and Wiser manifesto is set out from this section onwards and was written by the taskforce.

This manifesto for environmental action was agreed by us as a group, after three meetings, input from green ‘experts’, support from Green Alliance and our facilitator, Ann Finlayson.

When we first met as a group, we decided to discuss four practical issues – transport, energy and climate change, waste and recycling, and involvement in decision making. As we continued our discussions, some themes emerged which cut across the issues.

Above all, we were very much aware that older people often have fewer choices available to them than they would like. Some live on a small income, and are less able to move about. Many environmental campaigns are based on the idea of ‘choosing to be green’, but it is not that simple for older people. For example, poor public transport options and restricted ability to walk may mean that driving to local services is the only option, even if we would prefer to use greener modes of transport. And we may not be able to recycle all of our waste if, for example, a special trip to the dump is required, or recycling boxes are too heavy to lift.

We feel strongly that age should not be a barrier to being green. So our recommendations as a taskforce have two key aims:

- To secure a louder voice and more active role for older people in efforts to tackle environmental challenges; and
- Practical support for older people in making greener choices.

Below, we summarise our recommendations, then in the sections that follow, we discuss each in detail.

## summarising our recommendations

We have five principles that we believe should guide the way government and others approach environmental issues for older people, and four specific areas that we have highlighted as important: transport; energy and climate change; waste and recycling; and involvement in decision making.

### Guiding principles

Our first guiding principle is that **better communication is critical**. Older people often have strong networks of community groups, friends and families. If we are given good information, we can share it with people we know. So we recommend that local authorities recruit and train a core of retired people to act as environmental advisers in their community. And when communicating environmental messages, government should bear in mind that some methods are inappropriate for older people. Unexpected phone calls or visits, for example, can be a cause for concern. We recommend that local authorities age proof their communication strategies so they get the message across in the right way. We believe that older people have fewer opportunities than the young to learn about the environment. So we propose building links between older people and environmental education in schools, so that both sides can benefit.

“Our lifestyles lend themselves to more ecologically friendly activities, such as public transport use and more economical consumption. If we promote them it’s a win-win situation for people and the planet.” – Annie

Second, **we believe that older people can be role models for the environment**. Many older people want to make a difference, to improve the lives of their children and grandchildren, and can help change the minds of those who think they are too old to have to worry about the environment. Their actions could be supported and greater numbers of older people reached through having a figurehead, or spokesperson, for these issues. We would like to see the appointment of a high profile spokesperson for older people and the environment.

Third, **we want to see a much greater role for older people in decision making about the environment and issues that affect our communities**. We should be consulted on all issues that concern us and where we have something to offer, not just on issues traditionally seen as ones that we care about, such as health. To this end, we would like to see platforms for consulting older people on environmental issues at the local authority level created across the country.

Fourth, we think that **a principle of interconnectedness** should guide decision making, which understands the knock-on effects of changes. For example, out of town shops may lead to the closure of local facilities, and older people then lose the health and social benefits of being able to walk to local shops and see the same people regularly. We believe that communities must be viewed as a whole in policies to regenerate and develop them, with the knock-on effect of decisions thought through in detail.

Finally, **we put forward an important principle of fairness.** We do not want older people to be supported at the expense of other groups. For example, older people get a free bus pass, but other groups also deserve help with public transport. So we recommend that all people are supported in using public transport. We also think that small businesses should get more support in making a difference on the environment and setting an example in their community. We think the government should demonstrate consistency across its policies, in order to lead by example, and urge it to use interventionist policies where necessary to reduce the environmental footprint of those with the highest impact.

### Practical recommendations

We put forward practical recommendations for change in three specific areas.

#### Transport

To bring about a greener and fairer transport system, we recommend:

- Promoting public transport, especially in the design of new communities, retail outlets and essential services, so that it is a viable option for older people
- Stronger legislation to avoid the development of ever larger, faster and higher impact modes of transport
- Restructuring rail fares to incentivise the use of public transport for longer journeys and to address the financial barrier of expensive fares

#### Energy and climate change

To make sure that older people can contribute to reducing their carbon emissions, we recommend that:

- Energy companies should develop communication and green energy tariffs and products that are targeted at older people and their specific needs
- Housing associations should lead in delivering energy efficiency and promoting greener choices among their residents



**Enid, 72**, from London, has long been interested in the views of older people and the need for them to have a higher profile. She approached the taskforce from this perspective, as she previously knew very little about environmental issues and admits she is not the best recycler. As editor of Help the Aged's Forum to Forum magazine and a trained gerontologist, she has a real insight into the views of older people and what matters to them. **"We care for the young. Do you?"**

## Waste and recycling

As a group we felt that lots needs to be done, by both shops and government, to reduce waste – not just increasing recycling, but reducing the amount of waste generated.

We want retailers to:

- Provide consumers with more information about their environmental choices as they shop
- Provide more products that meet older people's needs to help avoid waste
- Tackle and reduce waste in all areas of their operations
- Consider take-back schemes for reusable packaging
- Provide clearer information about how to recycle a product on its packaging

We want local authorities to:

- Age proof recycling policies at the local level
- Promote local reuse schemes
- Promote composting to reduce food waste



## guiding principles

Some guiding principles emerged from our discussion. These principles and the recommendations that we developed against them are discussed below. They include:

- Better communication
- Older people as role models
- Involvement in decision making
- Interconnectedness
- Fairness

“The key thing is communication that is clear and easy for older people to understand.” – Alfred

### Better communication

Better communication with older people about environmental issues is critical. Without it, we lack the information that we need to make green choices and are unable to communicate green messages to our families and wider communities.

We are a potentially powerful way of communicating environmental messages. Many of us are members of groups that meet regularly, such as local Age Concern and Help the Aged or University of the Third Age groups, and we spend time at community centres and with our friends and families. Older people themselves are best placed to access these opportunities to talk to groups of our friends and peers about green issues. We believe that training a cadre of retired people to be environmental advisors, who can access these local networks, will be a powerful way of overcoming the low impact of any current methods of communication.

Local authorities can recruit and support these advisors to work as volunteers in their communities. They can take advantage of regular meetings of older people, many of which they may attend themselves anyway, to talk about environmental issues and to answer questions such as; should I use green energy or, can I get a grant to insulate my home? They can also visit those who do not get out as much to ensure that they are aware of things like the benefits of green home improvements and the support available. Their expenses should be covered, or a small stipend paid, and application should be an open process that attracts natural communicators who people already know and trust, not just the ‘usual suspects’ from existing council committees.

**Recommendation:** Recruit and train a core of retired people to act as environmental advisors in their community



As the group’s youngest member, [Spiwe, 52](#), wanted to get involved, as the taskforce is drawing on a group whose views are usually sidelined. Spiwe is passionate about advocacy and lobbying and is a keen volunteer on a variety of issues. She works part time as an outreach worker in a children’s centre and also runs training and facilitation in conflict resolution and health and safety. “My quest is for the interconnectedness of the community around talking and addressing issues for older people”

**“A change of attitude is needed from older people. I see them littering when they need to be role models.”**  
– Rene

In addition to the lack of impact of much communication, some methods are inappropriate for older people. For example, phoning or knocking on doors to talk about energy efficiency is engaging, but for many older people an unexpected call or visit, especially after dark, is a cause for concern. We would like to be consulted on what communication methods will work best and to ensure they are ‘age proof’. Below, we recommend that local authorities create a panel of older people to consult on environmental issues and this could be a feature of their work.

**Recommendation:** Age proof local authority communication strategies

Finally, we envy the opportunity that younger people have to learn about environmental issues in schools. We could benefit from that learning and information and we can also share our experience with younger people. For example older volunteers can run intergenerational environmental projects in or after school, such as developing an allotment. The environmental advisors recommended above could build links between schools and older people’s groups. Many local authorities have groups focusing on youth issues that people of any age can join, and we encourage older people to do so.

**Recommendation:** Build links between older people and environmental education in schools so that both sides can benefit

### **Older people as role models**

Older people have great potential to share environmental messages, as we can reach out to our families, friends and peers. Lack of information is a barrier to this but there is another, deeper, issue. Many older people want to make a difference on the environment because of the problems that our children and grandchildren will face if we do not act, but others think that they should not have to worry about the environment at their late stage in life.

We need to address this and make the case to the disinterested about why the environment matters to older people and the ways in which they can be green role models. To help with this, we would like to see the appointment of a high profile spokesperson for older people and the environment. This could either be a government appointment, with input from older people on who the candidate should be, or a charity initiative. This



**Christine, 62**, from Northumberland, is a member of her local Community Partnership, which acts as a catalyst for improvements. Through this, she is on a public transport consultation group that is trying to improve transport provision in her town and links with the wider region. She is a keen gardener and maintains an allotment, as much for the economic benefits of growing her own food as the environmental ones. She joined the taskforce as she feels that older people’s immediate concerns seem to bear little relation to green issues in the news and wanted to explore the links. **“We want to build a today for tomorrow’s community – think green.”**

person's role would be to demonstrate to older people why green issues are important and relevant to them, and to help raise the profile of the contribution that we can make.

Our views need a higher profile on all of the issues that we care about, not just the 'traditional' ones, such as health and care. We welcome the appointment of Dame Joan Bakewell as the Voice of Older People, but one person cannot cover everything. A high profile older person working specifically on green issues will help older people better understand the changes and contribution that they can make. At the local level, the retired environmental advisors we recommend above will be able to act as green role models in their communities.

**"I would appreciate help relating our essential lifestyle choices to local and national environmental issues." – Christine**

Initiatives such as Oxfam's Green Granny<sup>5</sup> support our view that older people can be good communicators of environmental messages. Barbara Warmley, the Green Granny, is featured in a number of short films online in which she gives tips about green living. Oxfam chose an older person for the work as they are seen as trusted sources of advice.

**Recommendation:** Appoint a high profile spokesperson for older people and the environment

### **Involvement in decision making**

A lot of our recommendations above involve older people having more say in the decisions that affect us. These range from decisions with wide ranging impacts, like town centre planning and public transport decisions, to more immediate decisions like how local authorities communicate with us about green issues. We have thoughts, views and experience to offer in all of these areas and do not want consultation with older people to be restricted to issues such as health care. We have time and enthusiasm to offer local decision making processes if they can accommodate us. We also feel strongly that our views are essential to ensuring that communication methods and services designed for us to use are fit for purpose.

**"Older people want choice and expectation but many don't have this. They want a say in the policies that affect the choices available to them." – Spiwe**

To this end, we recommend the creation of a platform for consulting older people at the local authority level. This could be based on approaches like the creation of citizen's panels. Throughout this manifesto we highlight issues on which we think older people should have more of a say and this suggested platform will be a key way to reach out and gather their views. These include things like: how appropriate are communication methods aimed at older people? Are there any practical challenges that older people will face as a result of a local authority's planned recycling policy? What impact will planned regeneration in the town centre or an out of town supermarket have on older people?

We believe that older people have the potential to be green role models and fantastic environmental communicators but they must be supported in taking green actions and should not find age a barrier to their commitment. Ensuring that local authority policies and decisions address the challenges that older people face and help to remove them is key to this. One of the best ways to avoid age being a barrier to taking action

is to seek input from older people themselves on the decisions that will affect them.

**Recommendation:** Create a platform for consulting older people on environmental issues at the local authority level

### Interconnectedness

Older people rely heavily on their local community and its shops and services, as we no longer travel in and out of it on a daily basis to go to work. As a result, we are very aware of the knock-on effects of decisions.

For example, if planning permission is given to an out of town supermarket or a post office shuts down and local shops suffer as a result, we may be forced to shop at the supermarket as well, whether we want to or not. This increased travel is bad for the environment and the journey may be more difficult than meeting our needs locally.

Most importantly, decisions like this reduce community cohesion and reduce sustainability. We lose the health and social benefits of being able to walk to local shops and see the same people regularly. Decisions that seem to be simple, economic ones can have serious impacts on older people and increase our isolation and environmental impact and reduce our activity.

“I’ve been on demonstrations about the closure of post offices. It’s the ones in small communities I worry about. The Post Office was our community centre and now it’s closed.”  
– Florence

Maintaining community cohesion is central to achieving many of the recommendations we have made. It is only as active members of our communities that we can act as green role models and provide useful input into decisions that will affect us and our communities.

We would like to see the potential knock-on effects of decisions thought through in detail and for older people to have input into them to ensure that public transport is promoted and that local services remain accessible. The local authority panel of older people that we recommend could be engaged in the consultation on planning decisions that we recommend here.

**Recommendation:** Communities must be viewed as a whole in policies to regenerate and develop them with the knock-on effect of decisions thought through in detail

### Fairness

Although we have focused on older people and the environment, we do not want support for our efforts to be green at the expense of others. We face barriers in making green choices as a result of age, but others face them for different reasons and should also be supported.

Public transport is a key area for this. We get a free bus pass, but we should not be the only ones who get support in using public transport. Others struggle with the cost as well, such as single parents taking their children to school. Green choices can sometimes be more expensive ones and people should be supported in making them. This will address a social problem of people finding it hard to get around with an environmental solution.

**Recommendation:** Support all people in need in using public transport – addressing a social problem with an environmental solution

We hope that a lot of the recommendations we make will help local authorities, community groups and individuals to support older people in making green changes. But, as keen observers of our communities, we feel that small businesses do not always get the support they need to make a difference. Many of them have to pay to use street recycling, although a house next door would get it for free. With tight budgets, making the green choice to recycle will not be a priority for them. We would like to see more support for them to do so, for example, allowing them to access domestic recycling services.

**Recommendation:** Support small businesses in making a difference on the environment and setting an example in their community

At the national level, leadership by example is an important part of inspiring people to make green changes in their own lives. It can be hard to see this leadership from the government when decisions such as airport expansion are made at the same time as speeches about the importance of tackling climate change. We would like to see more consistency across government so that their leadership can inspire people to make green changes in their own lives.

We also urge the government to be brave in using interventionist policies where necessary to reduce the environmental footprint of those with the highest environmental impact.

**Recommendation:** Demonstrate consistency across government policies in order to lead by example and to inspire people to make green changes to their own lives

**Recommendation:** Use interventionist policies where necessary to reduce the environmental footprint of those with the highest impact

**“Is this about saving money for older people or saving the environment for everyone? We’ll lose the point if we don’t stick to the environment.”**  
– Florence



Alfred, 80, has always worked to support his community and the older people in it. He runs an older people’s forum with 500 members and has long been active with his local council and local hospital on a variety of issues. He also works with young offenders and worked in the voluntary sector for a number of years. He was interested in joining this taskforce because of health and environmental concerns related to the large landfill sites near Warrington and to explore the environment as another facet of community action. **“It’s time we started working together. We need more support and funding for older people’s needs.”**

## practical recommendations

The recommendations below relate to the three practical areas that we focused our discussions on. They include:

- Transport
- Energy and climate change
- Waste and recycling

### Transport

The availability and cost of public transport, as well as its ease of use, are central to helping us live greener lives. Without it, we have to rely far more on driving or being driven. Transport is a key area in which our choices shut down as we age.

“They say that they want to promote public transport but then new housing developments have lots of car parking spaces.” – Rene

We feel strongly that communities – new homes, shops and services – get built with too heavy a reliance on driving as the primary method of transport. Out of town shops and new housing developments provide extensive parking, which is rarely matched by public transport options. We would like public transport to be the focus of transport planning in new developments and regeneration projects, rather than the automatic provision of car parks.

The free bus pass for older people is a vital way of helping older people make green travel choices, but it does need to be more flexible. The London Freedom Pass is a good model, as it allows free travel for older people on all modes of transport within London. Good communication about the financial and green benefits of the bus pass are also important to its success, as many people do not know they are eligible for one. The environmental advisors we recommend above will be a useful way of raising awareness of the bus pass. But we cannot make good use of it unless the public transport options on offer meet our needs.

**Recommendation:** Promote public transport, especially in the design of new communities, retail outlets and essential services, so that it is a viable option for older people

In comparison to the struggle to improve public transport, we continually see bigger, faster and more polluting cars on the market, as well as continual promotion of air travel. We would like to see stronger legislation to make vehicles more efficient, support for the



Stephen, 69, describes himself as a beginner on environmental issues and has only become more aware of them through pressure from his daughter. He joined the taskforce to get an understanding of the bigger picture of environmental issues. He has worked in business all his life and is a member of the patient's panel of his local NHS. “Prime Minister, you have children, I have children and grandchildren. What kind of world are we leaving them?”

development of electric or hydrogen cars, and more promotion of alternatives modes of travel, such as rail instead of air. We would also like to see higher taxes on more polluting forms of travel, such as air travel, to support the development of public transport. The potential of rail and canals for freight transport should also be explored, as they may be lower impact options than using trucks.

**Recommendation:** Stronger legislation is needed to avoid the development of ever larger, faster and higher impact modes of transport

**“Bus services are really useful. Old people go down to the bus shelter and they all have a chat, it’s a social thing.”**

**– Peter**

Cost can be a significant barrier for older people who want to use greener transport. Bus passes help with this at a local level, but for longer journeys trains are often too expensive. Older people can get reduced fares but this needs to be made clearer and easier to take advantage of, rather than relying on booking far in advance of travel, and fares are still very high for the wider population. We would like rail fares to be restructured and lowered so that they are an incentive to travel by rail. This will be a better reflection of the environmental benefits of using public transport for longer journeys.

**Recommendation:** Restructure rail fares to incentivise the use of public transport for longer journeys and to address the financial barrier of expensive fares

### Energy and climate change

We would like to see better communication from energy companies about green choices along with the development of green options that meet our needs. Most companies provide information about green issues but we would like to see some of it targeted at older people. This will help to remove the barriers to choosing green energy options and improving the energy efficiency of our homes.

Many of us think that green tariffs are more expensive or that they will not suit us, as we are at home more during the day. Targeted communication can address this and make it clear whether tariffs are suitable for our lifestyles. This will be more effective than sending out general leaflets and is a more direct way of encouraging older people to make green energy choices. There is a reliance on the internet to find the best tariffs and this can be hard to access and keep up with. Clear, accessible information for older people on tariffs and their different benefits is needed. We also need better information and



**Florence**, from Bury, now in her 80s, has always been a lively advocate for the rights of her community. Describing herself as ‘on every steering group there is’, she is involved in Better Government for Older People, a health steering group, a passenger transport group, an older people’s advice group and a youth group. She is passionate about the environment and is on local authority environmental groups, as well as introducing the issue into her other activities. Her special interest is recycling and getting others to do it. **“It’s no use talking about recycling unless we have information on why and what for.”**

“Couldn’t meters be in hallways and indicate excessive consumption by changing from blue to red?” – Peter

“I’d like to put in energy saving measures but without significant grants it’s impossible, and I’m concerned that even current grants will get cut.” – Tom

better options for improving the energy efficiency of our homes. Many companies offer customers incentives to install green measures but these can be complex to understand and do not address a key issue for older people, which is the length of time over which we have to pay back the costs and how to manage that. Many older people assume that improvements are not worth it, as they do not understand that their bills will fall and their comfort increase, or assume they will not be staying in their homes long enough to see the benefits. As above, targeted communication and options that address our particular issues and concerns will have much greater impact and take up.

**Recommendation:** Energy companies should develop communication and green energy tariffs and products that are targeted at older people and their specific needs

Many of the green options provided by energy companies are aimed at private homeowners and we would like to see the same options available to people living in local authority and housing association residences. Housing associations should lead by example in improving the energy efficiency of their homes, as some already do. For example, upgrading all their homes or committing to only using renewable energy on their sites. Housing associations also have the potential to

communicate wider green messages. They communicate regularly with tenants about a variety of issues and have the potential to be trusted sources of information on energy efficiency and green choices.

**Recommendation:** Housing associations should lead in delivering energy efficiency and promoting greener choices among their residents

### Waste and recycling

Our recommendations on waste and recycling are broken down into two sections, as some focus on retailers and some on local authorities.

### Retailer recommendations

Shopping is a key area in which we can make greener choices, but often we lack the information needed to do so. Shops are starting to make greener choices on our behalf but, as this is not communicated to us, we remain concerned about the impact of our shopping. For example, we are aware that shops do studies to weigh up the impacts of packaging versus the potentially increased food waste that may result if it is reduced and the result



Rene thinks it’s about time that older people are asked to be involved with the environment in a practical way because it is an issue that affects everyone. He is a presenter on his local community radio and introduces green issues when he can. He is also a member of the BME (Black & Ethnic Minority) planning group for Sheffield Homes Limited and won a Millennium Award for his work to tackle litter and dog mess. **“We older folk care deeply about climate change. We want to be involved at all levels.”**

may be that, on balance, some packaging is better. But unless this is communicated to us we will continue to find packaging frustrating and be concerned about the impact of our choices. Overall, we would like more information available to us as we shop that tells us about the ways in which the environmental impact of the products we buy is being reduced.

**Recommendation:** Provide consumers with more information about their environmental choices as they shop

We would also like to see more products available in shops that meet older people's needs. Many of us live alone and want to buy food, particularly ready meals, in smaller portions. These are rarely available and, as a result, we end up wasting food and packaging. Older people are an important set of consumers for products like ready meals and the current lack of options that meet our needs make it hard for many of us to make green choices when shopping.

**“It’s not that we don’t believe shops, we just want more information to make our own decisions.”**  
– Enid

**Recommendation:** Provide more products that meet older people's needs to help avoid waste

Overall, we would like to see a concerted effort on the part of retailers to tackle waste. In particular, we would like to see them reduce food waste in their own operations and to encourage it among their customers. We hope that many retailers are already acting on this and would appreciate more communication about it, so that we are able to make more informed choices about where we shop and what we buy.

**Recommendation:** Retailers should tackle and reduce waste in all areas of their operations

We think that ‘take-back’ schemes would be a useful way of reducing the impact of packaging and of encouraging recycling and reuse among consumers. We remember these schemes working well in the past but they are virtually absent now. We would like to see retailers consider them.

**Recommendation:** Consider take-back schemes for reusable packaging

Identifying whether packaging can be recycled or not is often a frustrating process. Even if we are aware of what can be recycled in our area, it can be hard to tell whether a given piece of packaging is



Peter, 64, is active in his Portsmouth pensioners group and thinks that pensioners can have an important influence on decisions made in their families and communities. He first became concerned about the environment while working in the Navy during the 1960s and worries about what we are leaving future generations. He joined the taskforce for the opportunity to discuss and learn more about the complex issues we face. **“We need support to ensure that the community has the funding and access to information and support, to ensure that our planet has a future, and for the next generation.”**

acceptable. This is particularly true of plastic packaging. This complexity means that many people do not bother recycling, or they mix everything up and the materials cannot be recycled.

**“I live in a town where they bury all of the waste for the whole of the northwest and it’s not very pleasant – there are lots of health problems.”  
– Alfred**

We are increasingly familiar with the numbering used for different kinds of plastic and, with good communication from our local authorities, can be informed about which ones we can recycle in our area. But retailers must match our effort with clear and prominent displays on their packaging so that we can easily identify whether we can recycle it or not and the best way to do so. Even if some of the promotional aspects of packaging have to be reduced, this approach would be a strong demonstration of manufacturer and retailer commitment to reducing waste.

**Recommendation:** Provide clearer information about how to recycle a product on its packaging

### Local authority recommendations

Recycling provision in the UK has increased significantly in our lifetimes. It should be an easy way for us to make a green choice without too much effort. But many older people find it hard to recycle for practical reasons. These can include bins being too heavy or security concerns about collection schedules that require bins to be put out after dark. There are also issues with bulkier waste, or special waste like batteries. If they require special trips to the dump, many of which do not have good public transport links, then we are often forced to throw these things away. It would be good if there could be special support for older people in recycling items that our domestic collections do not take.

We would like to see local authority approaches to recycling age proofed to ensure that older people can use the services and be supported in accessing specialised waste services. Above, we suggest that local authorities form a panel of older people to consult about green measures in order to ensure that their approaches, communication methods and decisions are appropriate for older people and enable them to take part. The issue of ensuring that older people are able to recycle our waste is a clear example of where such consultation would be valuable.

**Recommendation:** Age proof recycling policies at the local level



**Tom, 90**, is highly active on the environment in his community. He is chairman of the recently established University of Third Age Environment group of East Berwickshire and a member of a number of green charities and networks. He has recently been involved in establishing a community run allotment and composting scheme in his village. The taskforce has been a great opportunity for him to share his ideas and his passion for nature. **“The elderly have vast experience – of the 1930’s recession and the 2nd world war – which are of great value in the present situation. Call us in, ask for our advice, our experience, our knowledge.”**

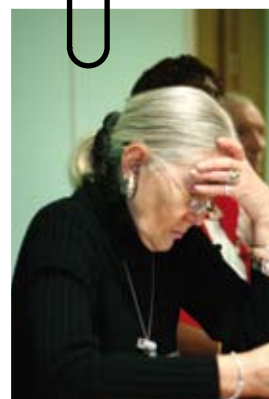
We would like to see greater support from local authorities for reuse. A lot of useful items get thrown away, as people no longer want them but are unsure what to do with them. It would be good if unwanted items, from furniture to crockery, could be taken to a designated place where they are available to anyone who wants them. We know that exchanging goods in this way does take place through internet based methods like Freecycle or through charity shop donations, but it has not become a priority for many local authorities. Some older people will use these methods and local authorities should promote them. But a centrally managed drop off and pick up point would also be welcome as well. Many older people will find this more secure as long as they are supported in accessing it. It would seem relatively simple to add a function like this to an authority's central dump and would reduce what the authority has to process as waste.

**“The majority of the population have no idea of ‘make do and mend’. We do!”**  
– Tom

**Recommendation:** Promote local reuse schemes

Finally, we would like to see a greater emphasis on promoting composting to reduce food waste. Many of us recall when composting was done as a matter of course, but it is less common now. We would like to see more local authorities working to increase composting and, of course, to take into account the potential limitations that older people will face in taking part.

**Recommendation:** Promote composting to reduce food waste



**Annie, 72**, from London, got involved with the taskforce because of her desire to have the voice of older people considered equally alongside other members of society. Green issues are important to her and, through working with her housing association's energy management group, she has strived to promote energy efficiency and reduce waste. She believes that benefits for older people can go hand in hand with benefits for the environment and that communicating the issues is key. **“The time has come to engage in open minded communication with the views and shared varied experiences of older people to help save the environment.”**

## footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Age Concern and Help the Aged merged in April 2009. Where they are referred to in this document, it is a reference to the new, merged organisation.
- <sup>2</sup> For example, there is great support for older people volunteering, for intergenerational projects that involve older people, for greater consultation, for champions for older people and for age proofing all strategies that affect older people in the wider policy community
- <sup>3</sup> DWP, 2009, *Empowering engagement: a stronger voice for older people – the government response to John Elbourne’s review*, Department for Work and Pensions
- <sup>4</sup> NICE, October 2008, *NICE public health guidance 16: Occupational therapy interventions and physical activity interventions to promote the mental wellbeing of older people in primary care and residential care*, NICE
- <sup>5</sup> see [www.oxfam.org.uk/applications/blogs/goodideasvideo/](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/applications/blogs/goodideasvideo/)

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We are grateful to them for taking part.

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Age should not be a barrier to being green.

There are 20 million people in the UK aged 50 and over, including many who are actively involved in their community and in promoting green issues. Yet the environment is often seen as an issue for young people, with green imagery centred around children and a focus on environmental education in schools. The environmental views and concerns of older people, and their ability to contribute, are in danger of being ignored.

The Greener and Wiser Taskforce, made up of 10 older people from around the UK, has been supported by Age Concern and Help the Aged, Green Alliance and Natural England. They have developed a set of clear and positive recommendations for change that will give older people a greater say on environmental issues, make greener choices easier and capitalise on their potential to help build more sustainable communities. Their manifesto sets out what they expect of government, of businesses and of each other.

**“Our environment is a legacy for coming generations and older people care about what we are leaving. We have an important role in our communities and we want a say in the decisions that affect us and better information and support to help us take green action.”**  
– the Greener and Wiser Taskforce

