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‘Living well locally’ in later life: Exploring the potential for 20-minute neighbourhoods to support active ageing in place in areas of deprivation

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Research problem

Existing literature highlights the importance of ‘staying active’ in later life, with particular emphasis on positive wellbeing benefits associated with participation in “social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs”¹. Local access to opportunities for staying active is vital, particularly given the common desire to ‘age in place’². In areas of deprivation, however, poor environmental quality and lack of quality service delivery leads many to experience unmet activity need^{3,4}. Significant regeneration efforts are therefore required in these areas, incorporating age-friendly design principles in order to enhance local capacity for active ageing by creating accessible and inclusive neighbourhoods.

Since 2024, 20-minute neighbourhoods (20MNs) have been a national policy focus in Scotland, with a strong focus on localisation which aims to increase neighbourhood accessibility, enhance climate benefits and decrease health inequalities⁵. The typical 20MN is a place where residents can meet the *majority* of their daily needs within 20 minutes of their home, via active travel means. 20MN policy



aims to create “a place for all ages”⁶, incorporating age-friendly design principles to support older adults to age in place, though concerns have been raised regarding the relevance of measures of accessibility for those with additional mobility needs, as well as the applicability of 20MNs in deprived urban, and rural, areas.⁷

Research aims & objectives

Aim: to critically examine the ways in which 20-minute neighbourhoods can support active ageing in areas of deprivation, as part of Scotland’s ‘Local Living’ strategy

1. Explore older adults’ understandings and experiences of active ageing within the context of deprivation
2. Consider the extent to which existing 20MN policy supports active ageing in place for older people living in deprivation communities in Edinburgh
3. Consider how 20MN policy and practice can better account for older adults’ priorities in order to support active ageing in the ‘right’ place
4. Make recommendations for more inclusive 20MN application

Case study sites

The City of Edinburgh’s ‘Local Living’ strategy outlines plans for 20MN delivery in 19 priority areas across the city including town centres, areas of disadvantage and rural areas. Case studies have been selected from areas of disadvantage, with focus on sites of ongoing regeneration works.

Craigmillar
SIMD level = 1-4
Project start: 2008

Granton
SIMD level = 1-3
Project start: 2020

Wester Hailes
SIMD level = 1-5
Project start: 2022

Sample

Older adults

Aged 65+

Community-dwelling with some degree of out-of-home mobility

Practitioners and professionals

Currently working or involved in a relevant area

Based within the City of Edinburgh or Scotland more generally

Data collection

PHASE 1: Capturing Experiences of Place

Semi-structured interviews with older adults (8-10 per site)

- Explore understandings of active ageing and experiences of staying active within the local area
- Explore perceptions and potential impact of 20MNs

Photovoice sessions with older adults (1-2 per site)

- Consider key barriers and enablers to active ageing locally

Semi-structured interviews with practitioners and professionals (25-30 in total)

- Explore perceptions of 20MNs within context of ageing and perceived supportive potential
- Consider areas for improvement with regards to supporting older adults

PHASE 2: Mapping Place and Change

Community mapping workshops with older adults and practitioners and professionals (mixed groups) (1 per site)

- Focus on supporting older adults to design their ‘ideal’ 20MN, highlighting key priorities for active ageing and 20MN development

Recommendations

It is intended that recommendations will be made for both policy and practice, with a focus on supporting more inclusive 20MN application which accounts for diversity of needs and priorities among older adults and incorporates age-friendly design principles in order to facilitate active ageing in the right place through local accessibility. These may include some area-specific recommendations, though it is expected that these will primarily impact wider 20MN policy in Scotland.

¹ World Health Organization (WHO) (2002). *Active Ageing: A Policy Framework*. Madrid. [Online]. Available at: <https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/WHO-Active-Ageing-Framework.pdf>

² Boldy, D., Grenade, L., Lewin, G., Karol, E. and Burton, E. (2011) ‘Older people’s decisions regarding ‘ageing in place’: A Western Australian case study’, *Australasian Journal on Ageing*, 30(3), pp. 136-142. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-6612.2010.00469.x>

³ Barrett, G. and McGoldrick, C. (2013) ‘Narratives of (in)active ageing in poor deprived areas of Liverpool, UK’, *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 33(5/6), pp. 347-366. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-09-2012-0084>

⁴ Scharf, T.P., C. Smith, A.E. (2004) ‘Poverty and social exclusion - growing older in deprived urban neighbourhoods’, in C. H. W. Hennessey, A. (ed.) *Growing Older: Quality of Life in Old Age*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

⁵ Scottish Government (2024) *Scottish Government Planning Guidance: Local living and 20 minute neighbourhoods*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-planning-guidance-local-living-20-minute-neighbourhoods/>

⁶ Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) (2021) *20-Minute Neighbourhoods: Creating Healthier, Active, Prosperous Communities: An Introduction for Council Planners in England*. Available at: https://www.tcpa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/final_20mnguide-compressed.pdf.

⁷ City of Edinburgh Council (2021) *20 minute neighbourhood: Living well locally*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/file/33790/20-minute-neighbourhoods-strategy-august-2023>.