

Mr Bob Gilbert
Chair, Cavan Older People's Council
c/o Community and Enterprise
Cavan County Council
Courthouse
Cavan

10th March 2017

Re: Submission to the National Planning Framework from Cavan Older People's Council

Dear Madam/Sir

In Cavan we have been running an Age Friendly County Programme since 2013 which aims to put in place a framework to ensure that older people are included in all aspects of the community. Through the programme, we want to improve older people's quality of life by enhancing services, addressing barriers and being informed by older people about their needs. When we talk about being an age friendly county, we mean that we want older people's to feel included in the life of the county, be able to access services with ease and contribute to decision-making about issues that affect them.

Internationally, the World Health Organization is promoting an age friendly agenda, in response to changing demographic trends. Older people are living longer, healthier lives and the proportion of older people in the world's population is increasing exponentially.

On behalf of Cavan Older People's Council, I would like to make the following points in relation to planning for the needs of older people, who are an increasing proportion of our population.

- Consultation with older people at local level is essential to inform County Development Plans and in relation to specific infrastructural developments.
- Lifetime homes – all homes should be designed with lifetime use in mind. This means that at least one bedroom and one bathroom are accessible and that entrances and door widths are accessible to people with mobility issues or mobility aids.
- Local authorities should be required to undertake 'walkability audits' of their main towns and villages in co-operation with older people's representatives.

- New housing estates should be required to have a mix of different sized units, including two bedroom units suitable for older people or for families who are downsizing. Bungalows should be included in estate designs as these are a more accessible option than two storey houses.
- Location of public services – new buildings such as Primary Care Centres should be located either within the town centre where they are accessible by foot. If outside the town then they should be on a public transport route that is regularly serviced. Car parking at primary care centres and other public buildings should be free of charge.
- Recreation space should be accessible and safe, planned with the needs of older people in mind, for example, with attention to issues such as public lighting, fencing, handrails near lakes, seating, signage.
- In rural counties such as Cavan, transport services are very limited. In general, planning for all services should take account of transport availability.
- Public seating – guidelines should be issued in relation to the positioning of public seating and the distance between public benches. Many older people need to rest at intervals when completing a journey through a town or village.
- Car parking spaces – designated parking for older people should be introduced (indicated as 'Age Friendly' parking) in certain areas, near relevant services such as shops, pharmacies, GPs etc. This would be similar to the accessible parking bays used by blue badge holders. Local authorities should be issued with formal guidelines on these spaces. Some individual local authorities have introduced age friendly parking under their County Age Friendly Programmes but it is not consistent across all local authority areas.
- Public buildings should incorporate appropriate seating. Public services should have a ticketing system or some mechanism to prevent older people having to stand in a queue for extended periods.
- Availability of public toilets is critical to the social inclusion of older people. Toilets should be made available in towns and villages and at parks and public areas, and should be appropriately signed to indicate their location. The business community should be encouraged to provide toilets for public use where the cost of providing public toilets is prohibitive.
- In terms of housing, results from the HAPAI survey for Cavan showed that older people in Cavan had issues with keeping their homes warm, maintenance of homes and adapting homes for different needs as they age. With these points in mind, housing for older people should be designed in the most energy efficient ways, with a low maintenance requirement, and with options around adapting rooms as needs change. Also sufficient funding needs to be made available to older people in need of financial assistance to make the necessary housing adaptations. The centralised funding provided by the Dept. of Housing to Local Authorities needs to be made increased and the

threshold for the subsequent match funding which Local Authorities are to provide should be lowered to facilitate this.

- Many older people live on their own and therefore it is essential that community facilities are provided near to residential areas to be used as a base for community and voluntary activities, social services groups and other opportunities for social interaction. This is important to combat the loneliness and isolation experienced by many older people.
- Public environments should be designed to enhance community safety. Many older women in particular do not feel safe in Cavan being 'out and about at night'. Planners should work with An Garda Síochána to consider issues such as crime prevention through environmental design.

I hope you will take these points into consideration for the new planning framework as they are relevant both to the older people of Cavan and older people throughout Ireland. Indeed planning in an age friendly way is inclusive of the whole community.

Yours faithfully

Robert Gilbert
Chair, Cavan Older People's Council