



# **Henfield Action for Older People**

**Henfield Community Partnership**

## **OLDER PEOPLE AND SHOPPING IN HENFIELD**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1) A decade ago the Henfield Community Partnership organised a study of the difficulties faced by disabled people when shopping in Henfield. That survey focussed on the built environment – the hard to open doors and steps up or down into shops. In 2017 the Action for Older People Group decided to revisit this issue but starting by focussing on older people, many of whom have mobility problems. Older people value their independence – and ability to go shopping is an important element of this independence.
- 2) In the current survey it was decided that we should start by interviewing a dozen older people, allowing them to freely express their views and problems. A later survey was carried out in three sheltered housing schemes to indicate the various modes of shopping: e.g. an almost daily visit or a big weekly shop.
- 3) The results of the present survey replicate very closely that of a decade ago; this is perhaps not unlikely since both the ‘disabled’ and many older people experience mobility problems – they use sticks, Zimmer frames, shopping trolleys, mobility scooters etc. Thus the situation in Henfield does not seem to have changed.
- 4) One reason for the apparent lack of change is that there was little follow-up after the earlier survey – apparently an open meeting of shop owners was held, with a follow up letter from the Partnership Chair. It is suggested here that shopping problems should be seen as an ongoing issue, with Henfield Partnership’s Action for Older People Group (a small group of volunteers) maintaining a watching brief, the Parish Council (together with District and County Councils as appropriate) being continually engaged and with the monthly magazines, websites, posters and leaflets playing an active role. There is also a potential role for organisations, e.g. Churches, the Haven, WIs, the Self-Help Group, to promote accessibility improvements.

A list of issues is contained in the concluding section.

## REPORT

### Antecedents

In 2004, in conjunction with the Henfield Parish Plan, the Henfield Community Partnership agreed to conduct a survey of difficulties experienced by disabled people in shops and public buildings in Henfield. The survey was carried out by Arun Agarwal in 2006.

The survey included visiting local businesses and inviting them to complete a questionnaire with details of their aids for disabled people; 87 were completed. Disabled people were invited to complete a questionnaire with 12 types of building, asking them to say whether those places in Henfield were fully accessible/partially accessible/not at all accessible/don't use/don't know. The 127 respondents were divided into three categories – use walking aids, use motorised scooter, use wheelchair. The results indicated the many improvements that could be made.

The chair of the Community Partnership held an evening meeting for businesses to discuss possible improvements; this was followed by a letter raising important issues. A full article appeared in BN5, July 2007, setting out the issues.

In 2017 the issue was raised again and AfOP agreed to conduct a survey of difficulties faced by older people. This was carried out in 2017-18 by Emeritus Professor Peter Lloyd, a resident of Brighton but for a decade a volunteer member of AfOP; since retirement he was involved in several voluntary agencies concerned with health and care issues among older people.

## The Project

It was decided by AfOP that the basis of the study should be an informal set of interviews with about 10 to 12 older people asking them to describe, in their own words, the problems which they encountered whilst shopping. It was agreed that starting by gathering the accessibility experiences of older people would provide a more persuasive rationale when approaching property owners and authorities with a view to improving access.

- a) Rationale: In later years one of one's greatest fears is loss of independence, on being dependent on others. Shopping – and attending other events – is a prime mode of expressing one's independence. They all provide a purpose and structure to the day, involve exercise (leading to better health) and enable one to meet friends, old and new, and to combat loneliness (a major focus of many voluntary organisations and Public Health projects, as loneliness can lead to depression, self-neglect and illness).
- b) The interviewees: 4 volunteers were sought from each of three areas; the Self Help Group held in the Henfield Hall (courtesy of Maureen Dexter), Sobell Court (courtesy Christophe Fernandez and Carol Rawlings), and Maidment Court (both are sheltered housing schemes managed by Saxon Weald).

It was initially decided that the sample should contain people with various types of mobility problem, together with those with sensory loss (vision, hearing) and cognitive problems (confusion). In fact the sample largely contained those with mobility problems – some with difficulty in walking/using a walking stick/using a Zimmer frame (various models of different complexity)/a motorised scooter. They most probably had other failings common to old age.

The interviews were held in their meeting places, and were designed to allow the interviewee to express their opinions in their own words, stressing the strength of feeling on each issue.

- c) After the interviews had been completed it was decided to carry out a small survey of sheltered housing residents to establish the various modes of shopping – a daily visit, a big weekly shop, shopping done by others etc.
- d) Henfield described: Henfield (see map p.12) is a fairly large 'village' with a population close to 5,000 (with 30.9 % of people over 65 in the 2011 census) The built-up area is surprisingly compact –approximately ½ a mile square. The High Street, with most of the shops etc. forms the eastern boundary – there is little or no development to the east. The Wantley Hill estate (which includes Maidment Court) is at the north-east corner and thus further from the shops etc. Within the built-up area there are a number of fairly narrow streets leading eastwards to the High Street; in addition

there seem to be several pathways (known locally as twittens) leading between the streets and so reducing the distance to the High Street.

## **1 Issues raised in interviews**

The issues freely raised in the interviews were remarkably similar to those raised in the Disabled report a decade earlier; clearly little has changed! We need 'to engage' older people much more (See Future Action p.11).

Also, we must remember that the interviewees are, individually, very different people: e.g. different mobility aptitudes (how well can those using hand operated wheelchairs and motorised scooters walk unaided?); some people really enjoy shopping, others find it a chore, some enjoy a 'day out', using buses to visit (and shop) in Steyning, Burgess Hill, Worthing.

### a) Getting to the High Street.

Residents in Henfield's main built up area usually walk to the shops; those in the Wantley Hill Estate (on the edge of which Maidment Court is sited) usually catch the half-hourly bus to and from the shops – the more modern buses have lower entrance platforms to facilitate use of Zimmer frames, scooters (and prams).

Walking to the shops can be difficult. Interviewees reported uneven pavements, pavements partially blocked by laurel hedges or overhanging trees, and cars (in the narrow roads) parked on the pavement.

The Parish Council to be notified of impediments to walking in the High Street and action initiated.

### b) Shopping availability

Many smaller towns and villages have, in recent years, been losing 'vital' shops and businesses e.g. surgery, pharmacy, bank, cafe, pub.

Any such shop and business losses, including the loss of all banks, in Henfield should be widely discussed.

### c) Crossing the High Street

The High Street is usually busy; it is part of the A281 linking Brighton, Shoreham Harbour and the coast with Henfield, Horsham and towns to the north. Thus, both local traffic and long-distance traffic (including lorries etc) are using the street.

The High Street has two sets of traffic lights (pedestrian controlled). Pedestrians fear that the road will be blocked in heavy traffic and that they will not be able to cross the street before the traffic begins to move again. These are perhaps fears – is the High Street an accident ‘black spot’?

One expressed need was for a crossing at the north end of the village, preferably near to the bus stops. This is where many children from the east of the High Street cross to get to St Peter’s Primary School via Deer Park, and is also the route to the Medical Centre, the Leisure Centre, sports facilities, and the Youth Club with its nursery from the east of the A281. There is a need for a traffic light pedestrian crossing.

The traffic experts in the County Council could be asked for advice.

d) Steps into buildings

This issue featured in the earlier Disabled report. Clearly anyone with a balance problem or using walking aids would experience a problem here. A handrail may be a partial help. People do not wish to park their wheelchair etc. outside the shop (and there is perhaps little space) for fear of theft. Providing level access can be costly and whilst all cases should be advised to take action, it is hardly expected that many will do so.

The oft cited example is the Post Office (a building often used by older people). This has a cafe on the south side of the building, with level access. Some interviewees ‘confessed’ to using this route into the Post Office. The Post Office has become, with three banks closed, an important source for obtaining cash, especially for people restricted to the village.

e) Stiff or heavy doors

Only the larger premises can afford automatic doors of any kind; many smaller ones have doors which are stiff or heavy and are a problem for those with little strength. The solutions suggested by interviewees included: bang on the door to get someone inside to come and open it; or wait for another customer to enter or leave the building and assist oneself. Most staff are, in fact, helpful; but advice from management would probably help.

f) Inside the shop

The earlier Disabled report suggested that all shops should train their staff to recognise the problems encountered by customers. Problems raised by our interviewees included narrow aisles between shelves, aisles blocked by staff replenishing the shelves, difficulty in reaching the top and floor level shelves.

### g) Toilets

Toilets feature often in media reports of austerity cuts; they are costly to maintain. Henfield High Street has male, female and disabled toilets in the bus shelter block on the west side of the street.

Many older people will refuse to use a public toilet for fear it will be dirty etc. Most will have used those in the Henfield Hall (where there are very good men's, women's and disabled toilets), but believe that the Hall management and staff expect those to be used only by those attending events in the Hall.

Shops do not include toilets though cafes, pubs etc providing snacks and meals may have well-maintained toilets – but these are usually only for customers.

The Parish Council could ask shops etc. with maintained toilets whether they would allow their use by 'outsiders'; Magazines might publish an annual list of such places; the people accepting such an offer may well be few, though they may well stop for a drink and become customers.

### h) Benches and seating

A trip to the shops usually lasts two or more hours; it is understandable that older people would welcome an opportunity to sit down and 'rest their legs'. Most of their time within the shops will be spent 'on their feet' searching for the items required.

- Henfield currently has eleven benches in the High Street. Some interviewees were not aware of some of them, and others suggested that more could be available, especially near to those bus stops without shelter or seating. It was reported that two seats, one besides the old Lloyds building and one outside the Jam Pot are extremely uncomfortable with iron bars well apart. They require little maintenance and could be made more comfortable. They were gifted by a local group who may be willing to modernise them.
- Invite residents to donate a bench (with a plaque 'in memory of...') for council staff to place securely to avoid theft.

- The picnic benches on the Common are excellent – but not suitable for people in wheelchairs.

It is suggested that at least one bench should be adapted, either with an elongated table for the chair to slip under, or for a seat to be halved to provide a gap for a wheelchair.

- Within shops:

Interviewees mentioned a large shop which formerly had a sofa inside for customers' use; this has now vanished. Most shops have little space but could well consider providing a chair. Pharmacies provide a special problem; Henfield's Medical Centre has a pharmacy but this can only be used by patients living more than a mile away; all others must use Lloyds Pharmacy in the High Street. Many will be anxious to start medication to ensure a quick cure; at Lloyds one may have to wait for the pharmacist to prepare the prescribed medication. In the past Lloyds has been criticised for not providing adequate seating for its customers. The situation has improved as the number of chairs was increased at the request of the Pharmacy pressure group when upstairs was developed and the shop refurbished. A new system of pre- packaging prescriptions, delivered from Bristol which, when introduced, will mean that Lloyds staff will not spend time making up packages. With a speedier service the need for queuing and seating should be reduced.

## 2. Questionnaire responses

In addition to the interviews with older people, Carol Rawlings, scheme manager for all three of Saxon Weald's sheltered housing, distributed a questionnaire to all residents asking how often they went shopping themselves, and what other means they used. In the short time available 40 residents responded (possible total c.75). Most of these residents were active, and thus not considered for interview. A space on the questionnaire enabled residents to add further comments; most of these related to the answers they had given, but a few mentioned 'problems' and these were very similar to the interviewees' comments.

Sheltered housing is for independent living – no meals are provided so one must feed oneself and maintain the house/flat. One must therefore go shopping. This survey cannot therefore represent all older people in Henfield.

1. A quarter shopped once a week
2. Well over half shopped several times a week. Some said they enjoyed it; it provided a structure for the day, it provided exercise, they encountered old friends and enjoyed a chat. Others said a week's shopping was too heavy to carry home so they went several times.
3. A quarter of respondents had their shopping done by family or friends – mostly they would do a large weekly or monthly shop.
4. Fewer than one in ten reported using a community bus; or used the Link, a service catering only for medical appointments.
5. The same proportion (1 in 10) used a web site to order shopping and have it delivered (in future years more older people will be able to use the web to order shopping).
6. The author of this report suggests that community buses (listed in AfOP's Directory of Services for Older People in the Henfield Area pp71-73) seem to be used by very few people; it would be useful to check with the operators to see if services can be made more popular.
7. The author of this report also suggests that magazines might list smaller shops prepared to receive phone orders and deliver (as Jeremy's the Greengrocer does), and larger shops with websites.

## **FOR FUTURE ACTION**

As stated earlier, this report highlights the same problems as were raised in the Community Partnership Disability report. Has there been any improvement? It would be difficult to measure. What has been lacking in the past decade has been any consistent articulation of these problems. Action for Older People has produced its Directory of Services for Older People in the Henfield area. The Parish/District/County Councils' Departments and staff have their own roles and tasks. The monthly magazines are widely read and highly regarded by Henfield residents. This is a wide variety of agencies which include a number of staff and volunteers. With coordinated and collaborative action it should be possible to produce visible actions that improve accessibility.

1. Action for Older People is a small group of volunteers under the auspices of the Henfield Partnership with experience/interest in older people. It sees its role as a 'watchdog', stimulating activity rather than getting heavily involved.
2. Coffee mornings, lunch clubs, and any meeting which can include discussion could arrange regular events at which problems of older people could be raised. A report could then be sent to AfOP etc.
3. Magazines could play a much larger role in articulating the views of Henfield residents.
  - i. Consideration might be given for a regular page "What Henfield lacks/needs" or reporting progress.
  - ii. Reporting outcomes from advertised meetings
  - iii. Helping to find donors of benches and available toilet facilities, listing them regularly.
  - iv. Helping Henfield residents to raise complaints, solutions to problems etc.

It could be the task of a named individual to receive complaints/suggestions (the author to remain anonymous) and to pass them on to relevant council officials, and others.

