HOSPITALITY CONNECT

End of Project Report

Welcome ALL

A Toolkit for Age-inclusive Hospitality Venues

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Contents

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Executive summary

The aim of the Hospitality Connect project was to explore the role of local hospitality businesses in supporting social connections among older people aged 65+, and to co-develop solutions that mutually benefit those who may be more isolated and/or lonely in their local community, and the cafés and pubs that serve them.

This report provides the combined findings from 36 interviews with 26 older café and pub customers and six venue owners/managers in Tower Hamlets, East London, and Guildford, Surrey, as well as interviews with four representatives from supporting organisations.

Our research has revealed that hospitality venues hold a significant role in the daily lives of older adults, serving as crucial social hubs for many. However, it is important to emphasise that the context in which these venues operate contributes to factors that can either facilitate or inhibit older people in their use of different cafés or pubs and when they might do so. These include geographic location (urban vs rural), socio-economic status, ethnic and cultural background, age, and health status.

The "Welcome ALL" toolkit

Using the findings from our project, we have co-created the "**Welcome ALL**" **toolkit** with older people and other stakeholders to help small to medium sized hospitality businesses become more age-inclusive. Specifically, the toolkit provides a range of simple and practical solutions in a menu-style format that businesses can easily adopt over different periods of time and with varying levels of financial and/or other resource requirements:

> **Starter:** Welcome ALL with a smile, instant impact with no costs
> **Main:** Welcome ALL with your commitment to serve ALL
> **Dessert:** Welcome ALL and be connected for the benefit of ALL
> **Sides:** Benefit ALL through additional resources for building an age-friendly community

The toolkit provides links to external resources designed to provide more specific solutions, including links to three short films co-produced with our older peer researchers and project supporters to highlight the benefits of our research approach and toolkit implementation.

The toolkit and films are available at **www.surrey.ac.uk/hospitality-connect-outputs**

About the project

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on the wellbeing of older adults and led to high levels of social isolation and loneliness, which the subsequent economic crisis has compounded. Hospitality businesses, such as cafés and pubs, are ideally placed to play an influential role in supporting social connectedness by providing welcoming places and valuable services within local communities.

We know that leisure activities, such as visiting a tourist destination, having a drink in a pub, or going to the theatre, improve the quality of life through the frequency of social contacts and help to reduce social isolation among older people. However, the UK's high streets and the licensed hospitality sector have experienced significant challenges in recent years, further exacerbated through the pandemic, Brexit, and the cost-of-living crisis.

Although it is widely acknowledged that both older people and the hospitality sector have been badly affected by the pandemic, the opportunities for mutual support and creating resilience between them are largely unexplored. The government's strategy for tackling loneliness emphasises the importance of community infrastructure and the development of interventions that address the issues associated with loneliness; yet there is a lack of understanding as to how the hospitality sector could help to improve older adults' social connectedness.

To identify existing and potential opportunities for hospitality businesses to play a significant role in supporting social connectedness within local communities, we conducted a study in two socio-demographically distinct locations (East London and Guildford) and employed a participatory action research (PAR) approach that places end-users at its heart. With PAR, 'peer researchers' address questions and issues that matter to their peers in their own communities; this project recruited a team of six older adults, all aged 65+ and resident in Tower Hamlets. Interviews in East London were led our team of peer researchers, whereas a traditional researcher-led approach was taken in Guildford.

We interviewed 14 older customers in four hospitality venues in Tower Hamlets and 12 older customers in three venues in Guildford about the role of local cafés and pubs in their social lives. We also interviewed three venue owners/managers in each location to understand the business perspective and spoke with four representatives from the Institute of Hospitality, Campaign to End Loneliness, International Longevity Centre, and The Centre for Ageing Better to obtain their views on the importance of hospitality venues in supporting social connectedness and how this might be achieved.

The findings drawn from the interviews with customers, business owners, industry and third sector organisations have been synthesised to create the "Welcome ALL" toolkit (page 16) in conjunction with our colleagues at Toynbee Hall, peer researchers and project supporters.

Research findings: what do older people want from hospitality venues?

The interviews conducted in both East London and Guildford provided us with a wealth of valuable insights. In this section, we will delve into the central themes that emerged consistently across both locations. Additionally, we will spotlight the aspects that our older customers told us they valued most about the cafés and pubs we interviewed them in.

Key similarities

👫♿ **Access:**

Convenience: for many older customers, the venues they liked to go to were convenient to get to from home or were conveniently located in relation to other activities they might be involved in on a particular day. Venues within walking distance, on a bus route, or close to good parking facilities and/or with dedicated parking outside the venue were popular.

Wheelchair and scooter accessible: ideally venues should have step-free access. Some of our venues had ramp or lift access, which some customers found useful for themselves, as well as when accompanying less-mobile friends. Installing grab rails at strategic points may also help, for example, where toilets are located up- or downstairs. To avoid any awkwardness or embarrassment, it is helpful if customers can determine how accessible a venue is from the outside. A venue where it is difficult to see inside might also deter people on their own from going in because they cannot see whether they would be able to sit down comfortably.

Space and layout: having a space which is easily navigable once inside is as important as being able to access the venue from outside, not just for people with pushchairs (some of whom may be grandparents) and wheelchair or scooter users but also as people generally become less agile with age. Having space between tables and a clear route to the toilet facilities and bar/counter is more relaxing for everyone.

🏛 **The business perspective:** older, or smaller venues and those with building restrictions may struggle to make their café or pub completely accessible to all; however, there may be ways to adapt as per the following two examples:

Step-free access by prior arrangement: one business owner explained how he was able to open the venue fire door to provide wheelchair access for one of their older regulars. By including the appropriate signage in the window, he realised others may benefit from a similar arrangement.

Alternative toilet facilities: one manager told us less-mobile customers, unable to negotiate the steep steps down to the basement toilet facilities, were easily able to access the ground floor toilets in a nearby retail venue.

⁂ **The stakeholder perspective:** it would be helpful to know in advance which cafés and pubs in local communities are age-inclusive and are able to accommodate a range of disabilities or can provide access solutions, if required. This is information that local councils, social prescribers, and care organisations could hold and share.

👥 **Atmosphere and facilities:**

Welcoming and friendly atmosphere: interviewees stressed the utmost importance of cafés and pubs exuding a welcoming atmosphere, particularly one that embraces older patrons, with the role of staff seen as pivotal to this process. A smile, making the effort to say hello, and getting to know the customer was appreciated by our older customers and was an important factor in motivating people to return time and time again. Staff offering a helping hand, if needed might be appreciated; for example, offering table service, opening a heavy door, or helping an older customer read the menu options. However, older people do not want to be singled out because of their age and it was paramount that they do not feel patronised by staff.

> *"One doesn't want to feel that the owner thinks 'oh, here's a sad old person, let's be especially nice to him'."*
> **Customer, Guildford**

Being welcoming to older people may include taking care to provide user-friendly ordering and payment options. Even though some are tech-savvy, not every older person has a smart phone or is able to read a small print menu or wants to order their food or drinks via an app. Some still prefer to pay with cash and/or would like a till receipt.

Clean and comfortable: our customers looked for a clean and comfortable space to go to with good toilet facilities. Being comfortable also included:

- Having plenty of seating and a variety of seating; for example, a mix of comfy seats, including sofas, and chairs with good back support, as well as a range of table arrangements to facilitate small to large groups or people on their own, and those with mobility issues.
- Having attractive surroundings. The décor along with good lighting and acoustics can help to create a relaxing atmosphere. This may relate to the time of day, for example, when the venue is less crowded and less noisy; however, while some older customers expressed a preference for a quieter space where they can chat with their friends or read, they also said that they do not want to feel pigeon-holed as always wanting this, or that not all older customers dislike noisy venues.

Intergenerational spaces: customers told us that they prefer to be in a place where there are lots of different demographics and mix of ages making use of the space.

> *"Sometimes I'm thinking 'actually I really don't want to be an older person' and I stand a better chance of pretending I'm not if I come here."*
> **Customer, Guildford**

🏛 **The business perspective:** there may be restrictions on how much staff are able to assist older customers in the venue, especially those with mobility issues, and how comfortable they may feel doing so. Specific training might be required under certain circumstances and organisations which can help with training are listed in the toolkit.

Some business owners might not be able to make modifications such as altering the furniture arrangements without significant investment.

🫖 **Products:**

Customers in both locations had a lot of different things to say about the products that venues offer, as well as the service, but they all looked for good value for money. As appetites tend to decrease with age, this might include offering smaller portion sizes, or it could mean adding a range of simple or more traditional food options, which may cost less. Several customers told us they would prefer to eat a light bite or "nothing fancy", such as a simple sandwich.

This section has focused on the similarities between customer preferences in East London and Guildford. In the next section we will look at the differences between the

two locations in terms of the key themes identified and the things that facilitate or inhibit social connections.

Key differences

✖ Location and access:

Almost every participant in Guildford said that the lack of public transport, limited parking in the centre of town and escalating parking costs made getting to venues more difficult for some older people, especially those living in more rural areas.

🏛 The business perspective: where one of our businesses was located further out of the town centre and relied mostly on residents, local students, and trades people for custom, the other two venues were located near to the high street and relied more heavily on customers who come into town to shop or take part in a specific activity. Closure of one of the park and rides, a reduction in the number of buses running and frequent service cancellations make it more difficult for some of the regular customers to visit.

🏘 Sense of community and staff:

This theme was particularly relevant for people in East London. Going out to venues to connect socially, meeting for a chat with old friends but also making new ones, was the biggest draw for these customers. Sometimes a pre-existing sense of community that had been built up over time continued to draw them to a particular place. The sense of community appeared in different ways, for example, friendships made over time in venues that feel connected to the local community but also through relationships built with staff and managers. This was much less evident in the interviews in Guildford.

> *"I mean, when I'm talking about this place, I think they say hello to everyone. And they tend to know most of their customers in here actually. It's quite unique compared with a lot of places."*
> **Customer, Tower Hamlets**
>
> *"Sometimes people do just want to be left alone in their bar. Which we cater to as well. I don't want people to think they are forced to engage while they're here."*
> **Owner, Tower Hamlets**

Staff were felt to be key to fostering this sense of community. Whilst we saw earlier that taking time to chat and getting to know a customer was valued by customers in both locations, staff interactions appeared to be more important than service provided by staff and not feeling rushed to leave or pressured to buy something to stay was important to those interviewed in East London. Not feeling pressured by staff also fed into the theme of creating a welcoming and friendly atmosphere, and a relaxed and comfortable space.

🏛 **The business perspective:** creating a sense of community may include working with other organisations in the area. One venue was a regular meeting place for the local u3a (University of the Third Age) and also hosted various events and activities for local communities, although these tended not to be free of charge.

Managers in East London told us that staff sometimes encourage customers to talk to each other. Some staff schedules are arranged so that they align with the customers they get on well with and staff at one venue were receiving specific training to help them interact with people with dementia after becoming a dementia-friendly venue.

However, owners had found that not all older people go to venues to meet new people or to make new friends. Not everyone will want to interact with a stranger or will even share the same interests or viewpoints. Staff need to be mindful when introducing customers to each other. Customers in Guildford felt strongly that this was not the main reason for going to hospitality venues, although one business owner noted that a group of single older regulars had formed a small friendship group gradually over time.

🏙 **Venue choice**

In East London, the loss of traditional venues and gentrification has left older people with fewer places to go to connect socially. There was a feeling that increasingly pubs in the area were targeting a younger crowd and this, along with the increase in prices, can make venues less welcoming. In contrast, customers in Guildford enjoyed going to several different venues and in different locations.

£ **Price and costs**

After sense of community and staff, price and costs were the next most important factor in drawing people to a particular pub or café in East London. Many went to a venue because it

had the cheapest pint or coffee in the area and £1 teas were very popular. In Guildford emphasis was on quality and menu choice.

Vouchers and discounts were one of the most frequent suggestions for drawing more older customers in to spend time in venues, but especially in East London.

🏛 **The business perspective:** venues with more room and quieter periods during the day, such as Oxford House in Bethnal Green, may be able to take a more relaxed approach to managing the space, but this was felt to be a sensitive balancing act:

> *"You get people sitting nursing a £1 tea and your space is – if you've got other things going on or it's quite busy or if you haven't got anybody else in, you know, but the good outweighs the bad and it's something we'll always offer. Because we have to be affordable for everybody."*
> **Manager, Tower Hamlets**
>
> *"We wouldn't ever do a discount specifically for the over 65s. If there's a discount available for someone, then it is available for everyone else as well."*
> **Owner, Tower Hamlets**
>
> *"I love customer service and I want people to feel welcome, as we all do and, once you start making a connection people, then they have a bit more loyalty which works both ways."*
> **Owner, Guildford**

Internet access scheme: one venue encouraged its customers not to overstay their visit without making a purchase, however small, through their internet voucher scheme. Each voucher entitles a customer to 60 minutes of free WIFI access, although when the voucher runs out another may be requested at the counter. This tends to evoke a sense of obligation so that people feel obliged to buy something else at the same time.

Loyalty/discount schemes: owners/managers were aware that some people may be struggling with the cost of living and told us they work hard to keep their costs and prices as low as they can. However, none felt it appropriate to target a discount or voucher scheme specifically at older people because this could potentially alienate some customers and/or intimidate others.

Of the venues that took part in the research, only the Star Inn and Lorenzo's Café (both in Guildford) offered a 'loyalty scheme', which is available for all customers irrespective of age. Where the Star Inn's scheme is generic across all Shepherd Neame pubs, Lorenzo's loyalty

scheme is in the form of a drinks card where the customer receives one free drink after buying nine. In contrast, the Nelson's pub in Bethnal Green offered a discount scheme in the form of a 'happy hour' that operates between 5-6 pm and offers certain drinks at half price. This was described by the landlord as a large draw for customers of all ages; offering a discount for older people on a specific day or time-period was effectively envisaged as an extension of the happy hour.

The owner of V Café in Guildford viewed loyalty as mutually beneficial and not requiring purchases or monetary discounts, i.e. loyalty to the customer, through good service, care, and good products, is typically rewarded by customer loyalty and *vice versa*.

⃰ Activities and events

Increasing the number and/or type of activities available at venues was a popular suggestion for bringing in more older people to connect socially in East London. Some of the customers we spoke to enjoyed karaoke nights, or pool, for example, although several people felt there used to be more activities that older people were welcomed at in the past.

In contrast, participants in Guildford thought that putting on activities or increasing the number and types of activities specifically targeting older people would be off-putting for many but might be good for "other" older people. None of the participants interviewed felt they needed specific activities or events at hospitality venues to be socially active because they were content with the interests, hobbies, and friendship groups they already had. Some even felt they were leading busier lives in retirement than they had been when working.

Advertising and outreach: better advertising and outreach to let people know what's on and to emphasise that people of all ages are welcome was a popular solution in East London. It was also suggested that this could include information about discounts, loyalty schemes, and special offers, including happy hours.

It became clear through interviews with customers and business owners that promotion and communication could be improved. This is illustrated by means of an example taken from one of our pubs. On the one hand, one customer told us that the ladies' darts team no longer existed, yet the landlord informed us that the ladies met in the pub every Tuesday evening.

Confidence and motivation: whilst the above points illustrate some of the key differences in the findings between customer experiences and views in Tower Hamlets and Guildford, participants in both locations felt that confidence and motivation were essential to enable some older people to get out of the house and into venues to connect socially. This is important

when considering activities and events but was also found to link to the sense of community theme identified in East London.

"Even my friends who can physically go and do things tend not, but that's a confidence thing. People who are so isolated, I think there's more that could be done if we could somehow get groups together."
Customer, Guildford

Participants in both locations felt that older people tend to lose confidence socially as they age or might find it harder to go out once they have stopped doing so; the obvious example of this is after the pandemic. For those people who might be living on their own or are more socially isolated or less mobile, having the confidence to go out to connect socially but, also, the motivation to do so, was considered key. Hospitality venues were felt to provide a good reason for getting out of the house, although the more elderly and/or those with health issues might need support (e.g. transportation) in getting there.

Gender is also important, with participants in East London and in Guildford noting that it can be harder for women to go to pubs on their own, or less comfortable, even if they have arranged to meet with someone they know inside the venue.

> *"There's a presumption that 'oh, you're old and they're old',, you know 'you should want to hang out with each other;. The person's like, 'I've got nothing in common with this person'."*
> **Manager, East London**
>
> *"This is a pub. We sell alcohol but we don't know if it's a healthy thing to be promoting it and say, 'come and drink more in your older years' because you're not promoting a healthy lifestyle. I mean, sometimes we do promote our range of soft drinks and stuff like dry January."*
> **Manager, East London**

🏛 **The business perspective:** for those people who are motivated to go to venues on their own, businesses were keen to point out that this does not mean that they wish to engage with other customers/staff or take part in organised group activities or events. Importantly:

- Being invited to join in an activity specifically targeting older people may be perceived as patronising or be off-putting.
- It can take time for an older person to build confidence to take part in a group activity.

- It is important not to make assumptions about a person's interests or assume that two older people on their own may like to talk to each other.

The owners and managers interviewed felt there was little they could do to motivate more isolated older people to leave their home and visit a café or pub, although some felt it was important that they know which venues are welcoming of older people and therefore might feel comfortable to be in (one owner cautioned against advertising a venue as "safe"). Similarly, it was felt that more isolated older adults may not be aware of the places which are accessible or affordable and/or may be reliant on their family, friends, or a support organisation to take them there.

Partnering with third sector organisations: Oxford House in Bethnal Green was in the process of organising staff training to help them interact with customers with dementia and to be able to offer support, if needed, as part of their dementia-friendly bronze award. Being recognised as dementia-friendly is one way of demonstrating one's venue is age-inclusive and welcoming of older people to customers/carers. Offering times when different community groups could access and use the space was also considered important. This may also help the business attract new customers and facilitate more customer-to-customer interactions.

Advertising, promotion, and communication: effectively reaching an older audience to promote their venue's offerings was viewed as a challenging endeavour, marked by high costs and additional resource demands. The use of social media was generally regarded as a hurdle for many older individuals. Instead, more conventional advertising methods, such as distributing flyers on community bulletin boards, placing ads in libraries or local newspapers, and featuring on websites, were believed to be more effective, although not entirely so. Nonetheless, it was widely acknowledged that word-of-mouth communication, i.e. personal recommendations, was considered the optimal way to connect with individuals aged over 65.

In this vein, partnering with specific community organisations was seen as a way of reaching certain hard-to-reach groups, although this also requires time and resources to build and maintain the links. As an area with a high density of social housing estates, one landlord in Tower Hamlets thought it possible to promote local pub events via the various residents' associations and community centres; however, this too has resource implications (who maintains the list and keeps it current?) and this would not work in all geographic locations. At the same time, advertising might not always be seen as appropriate; particularly in relation to pubs and/or through certain organisations keen to promote a healthy connected lifestyle.

⁂ **The stakeholder perspective:** businesses could contact their local council, volunteer groups and other third sector organisations, such as Age UK, social prescribers, to provide them with the details of facilities they offer. However, businesses need to be mindful of the

customer demographics and local area when considering solutions to make their spaces more age-inclusive. Older people represent a heterogenous group – health, financial, and motivational status will vary enormously – it is imperative not to make assumptions, not to focus just on the 30–40-year-olds, and to think about intersectionality.

Reflections on project locations and research findings

All our older customers were aged 65+ and described themselves as regulars at the café or pub they were interviewed in; although understandings and definitions of 'regular' use of venues was found to vary between participants with some visiting certain venues almost every day, weekly, or once every one to two months.

Identifying venues: identifying independent cafés and pubs popular with older adults was more challenging than the peer researchers and the team at Toynbee Hall had originally envisaged. This was attributed mainly to lack of affordable venues in Tower Hamlets and the team were unable to recruit as many older customers as they had originally planned at the second café site, nor were they able to recruit an alternative café willing to take part in the project.

Location: customers in Tower Hamlets tended to live locally to the venues they frequented, more so than those in Guildford, and this ties with the 'sense of community and staff' theme.

Financial resources: customers in Tower Hamlets either did not eat out or tended to eat out less often than the customers in Guildford. However, this may also reflect the fact that neither pub in East London could be described as a pub that serves food, although the Nelson offers Sunday lunch.

Health and wellbeing: Several participants in Tower Hamlets told us that spending time in these venues was a key motivation for getting out of the house and had had positive impacts for their health and sense of wellbeing. The manager at Oxford House told us that staff quite often support customers facing mental health challenges or those struggling with technology by 'lending an ear' or by helping older people fill out forms, for example, to switch energy provider.

Although not all participants talked about their health or how poor health might impact their social lives and what they could do in their free time, getting together and connecting with others was felt to boost health and mental health, particularly among some of the participants in Tower Hamlets.

In contrast, participants in Guildford appeared to enjoy good physical and mental health and were active socially in a way that was less dependent on the presence of these venues; for

example, more than half regularly volunteered for various organisations or charities. However, it was acknowledged by some that it would be more difficult to get out and to access local hospitality venues were their health to deteriorate. This was also linked to the 'confidence and motivation' sub-theme of the previous section, and which several participants considered vital to remaining or becoming socially connected, along with having the necessary resources (support network, money, knowledge) and means of getting there. It is worth noting here that participants in Guildford had more to say about their interests and how they spend their time compared with those in East London, which also helps to account for differences in interview duration.

Demographics: customers in Tower Hamlets tended to be slightly older than those in Guildford with a median age of 70-74 compared with 65-69, respectively. Almost two thirds of participants in East London appeared to be living by themselves compared with a quarter of those living in the Guildford area.

The two research locations were purposively chosen to reflect the two socio-demographic profiles of the two communities to address the cross-societal challenges of social isolation through the co-design approach. Tower Hamlets represents a more deprived and diversified area with more than 40% of inhabitants from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups whereas Guildford in Surrey is more affluent with more than 80% white British population. However, despite project expectations and the effort made to recruit at least 40% of the participants in East London from BAME communities, our older customers were not representative of the diverse groups living there. This highlights one of the main limitations of study; specifically, that the project was limited by the number and type of venues that could be included.

Research outputs: The "Welcome ALL" toolkit

The "Welcome ALL" toolkit has been developed with our peer researchers, participants in the research and various stakeholders through two co-design workshops and a knowledge exchange event (Appendix 1) held at Toynbee Hall on project completion.

It is intended to help hospitality businesses become more age-inclusive in ways that are beneficial for both customer and business alike. The toolkit uses clear, concise language free of jargon, and has a simple, attractive, and easy-to-follow structure in the form of a restaurant 'menu' (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Toolkit structure
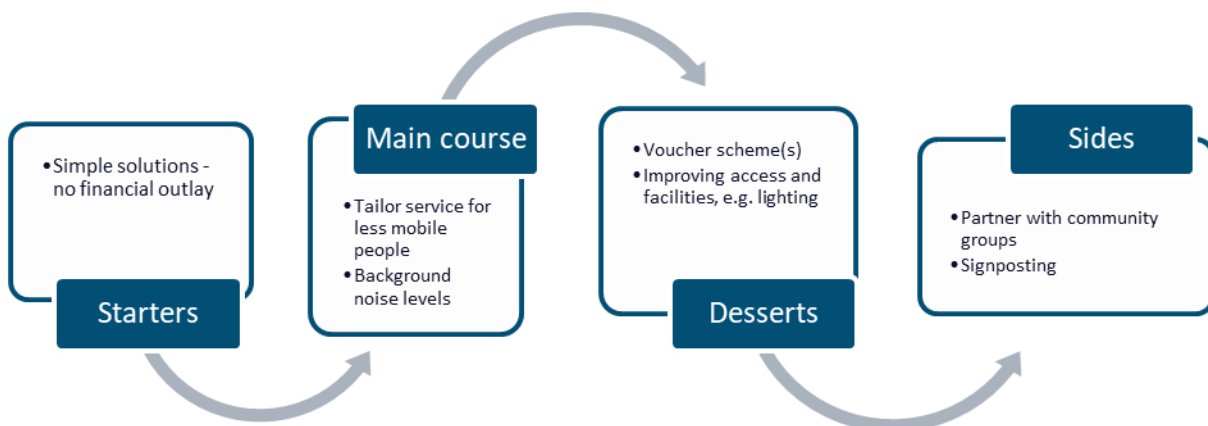
Implementation timelines have been included to help motivate businesses to try out the different recommendations through projected return on investment values.

The toolkit has been based on the following themes, which came out of the interviews with customers in East London and Guildford:

- Creating welcoming social spaces
- Pricing and discount schemes
- Activities and community groups
- Outreach activities.

The toolkit (including links to the short films co-produced with peer researchers and other stakeholders) is an open resource and freely available in digital and downloadable formats via the University of Surrey at **www.surrey.ac.uk/hospitality-connect-outputs** and Toynbee Hall at **https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/research/** as well as the supporting organisations listed in the acknowledgements section of this report.

Project recommendations and next steps

This section contains feedback from the co-design workshops and knowledge exchange event pertaining to the toolkit and its implementation. Participants at these events were specifically asked to consider how the toolkit could be made available, what the main challenges to getting the toolkit used might be, and how these challenges could be addressed. We identified three key challenges in developing and getting the toolkit adopted:

1. Making the content sufficiently appealing for busy venue owners/managers to engage with. *This has been achieved through the toolkit's simple menu style design with practical, easy to read and easy to adopt solutions.*

2. Ensuring potentially willing partners are targeted over those that will be more resistant to change. *This will be achieved through disseminating the toolkit and the short films through project partners and supporters to reach their members. We will also strategically target relevant conferences such as the Healthy Ageing conferences to encourage and engage attendees to take away give the toolkit to their local businesses and/or their community members.*

3. Getting venues to implement the toolkit recommendations and embed practical solutions in their everyday business practices. There was a feeling that toolkit development and implementation should be an iterative process with, if feasible, follow-up with different businesses to seek feedback and to help refine and re-assess content, e.g. at 6- and 12- months post-implementation. *Implementation step.*

The project has successfully delivered **a toolkit** and **three short films** directed at business owners and managers to help them engage with one or more of the different solutions designed to make hospitality venues more age-inclusive. We have identified a series of recommendations and next steps.

Immediate next steps will include:

Awareness raising and dissemination of the toolkit and short films
- Launch toolkit via press release and social media (University of Surrey and Toynbee Hall).
- Make the toolkit available to hospitality businesses through hospitality sector organisations and trade bodies, such as HOSPA and the Institute of Hospitality.

Engagement with hospitality businesses and toolkit adoption
- Engage with stakeholders to encourage businesses to adopt the toolkit and implement at least one solution to create age-inclusive spaces.

- Engage with business owners/managers who took part in the research to encourage adoption of the toolkit and further dissemination through local hospitality networks.
- Encourage local community organisations, including local councils and social prescribing groups, to engage with local hospitality venues to explore opportunities to host social activities, groups, and events through local hospitality venues (and *vice versa*).

Short to medium-term steps will include:

Testing and toolkit revision iterations
- Assessments of usefulness of the toolkit and its solutions. For example, collect basic metrics, such as the number of businesses that have implemented the toolkit, which solutions they have implemented, and over what duration.
- Collect and evaluate feedback from staff and customers.
- Toolkit revision and wider distribution. For example, the current project was limited to venues in the south-east of England, but the toolkit could easily be adapted for use by businesses located in different regions and by different types of venues in the UK.

Longer term steps will include:

Evaluation and impact assessment
- Monitor the continued commitment to and promotion by hospitality professionals and third sector organisations.
- Monitor changes in practice.
- Measure increase in visits and increase in sales generated by older customers.
- Recommend evidence-based policy changes, i.e. based on the project findings and evaluation.
- Monitor improvements in social connectedness measures at businesses which adopt the toolkit.

Policy considerations
- Extend local authority food voucher schemes to include meals at hospitality venues.
- Utilise hospitality venues to supplement the role of the traditional community centre, or replace those in areas where centres no longer exist, in supporting local communities to be socially connected.
- Recognise the social value of hospitality businesses for community wellbeing by offering tax relief for age-inclusive venues

Appendices

Appendix 1: Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach

With PAR projects, peer researchers address questions and the issues that matter for their communities. Researchers from the University of Surrey worked together with community-based charity, Toynbee Hall, to implement a peer researcher approach in East London (figure 2), whereas a traditional researcher-led approach was employed in Guildford. Peer researchers accompanied a member of the Toynbee Hall or the University of Surrey team and led on interviews with older customers and business owners/managers in East London.

Figure 2: Peer researcher approach

Six older 'peer researchers' (aged 65+) half of whom were recruited from local Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, helped to design, collect, and analyse research data from their peer groups as well as our business owners and managers. Importantly, the peer researchers also played an active role in the co-creation of the research outputs, including the "*Welcome ALL*" toolkit.

Peer researcher workshops

A series of workshops were designed to facilitate research team interaction and to provide training to our peer researchers at key points during the project. In total, five workshops were held at Toynbee Hall:

Project introduction and focus group (November 2022) – peer researchers were provided with an overview of the project and encouraged to ask questions about the research and qualitative design. Attendees were invited to consider the types of questions their peers should be asked to address the research questions and in relation to the types of venues their friends/other members of the local community tend to utilise.

Venue selection (February 2023) – listings of venues identified by the individual peer researchers were reviewed and discussed as a group before prioritising which café and pub-owners should be approached to take part in the project.

Final venue selection and research training (March 2023) – the first part of the workshop focused on reports from peer researcher visits to the shortlisted venues and additional cafés. These were discussed in relation to the selection criteria and feedback from interactions with staff. Peer researchers were provided with an overview of the research process, comprising an introduction to 'go-along' interviews (i.e. taking place in the venues), methods of recruitment and participant consent, and took part in an interview practice session.

Data analysis workshop (June 2022) – peer researchers were asked to reflect on the research process and what they felt had gone well but, also, the challenges they had faced in conducting the fieldwork and the ways in which these were addressed. This was followed by an introduction to thematic data analysis, provided by the Toynbee Hall research team, and a 'hands-on' training session, including review of selected transcripts from the interviews with older customers in Tower Hamlets. Peer researchers shared their main observations and identified what they felt were the most important findings, which were then mapped as a series of key themes and sub-themes.

Co-design of the co-design workshops (June 2023) – in this workshop peer researchers were challenged to consider what might go into the toolkit and how this could be co-designed through the co-design workshops with other stakeholders.

Toolkit co-design and knowledge exchange workshops

Two workshops were held on completion of the fieldwork and thematic analysis of data from interviews with customers in East London and in Guildford. The purpose of the workshops was three-fold:

1. to share the research findings with customers and the venue owners/managers who took part in an interview, as well as representatives from hospitality sector, community support and government organisations involved in decision-making
2. to act as a forum to discuss ways in which venues could facilitate greater social connectivity among older members of the community, and
3. to generate solutions that could be included in a resource that venues can use to become more age-friendly.

Each workshop comprised a series of break-out sessions designed to address questions that would lead groups to consider their ideal age-inclusive venue and the ways in which hospitality venues could be best supported to become more age-inclusive. This also included questions

to consider the content and format of the toolkit. Knowledge exchange attendees were provided with the co-designed toolkit developed through the previous workshops and asked to provide their feedback on both content and format.

Appendix 2: Venue selection and participating venues

Venue selection followed a similar process in both locations. Peer researchers and the Surrey research team used the internet to identify venues and visited numerous venues in the local area to draw up an initial short list of potentially suitable cafés and pubs to take part in the project. This list included venues that attracted older customers and were independent businesses rather than part of a chain. A shortlist was subsequently produced on the basis that venues were

a) community based, i.e. frequented by residents rather than working people or tourists
b) spacious and, preferably, wheelchair accessible
c) reasonably priced, and
d) focusses on 'everyday' consumption, i.e. was not a 'themed' venue.

Venues on the shortlist were then visited and the business owners or managers invited to participate in the project.

This resulted in the selection and recruitment of four venues in Tower Hamlets and three venues in Guildford.

Participating venues in Tower Hamlets

Oxford House Café
Oxford House Community & Arts Centre

Club Coffee,
Whitechapel
Bethnal Green

The Marquis of Cornwallis
Bethnal Green

The Nelson's pub
Bethnal Green

Participating venues in Guildford

Lorenzo's Café

The Star Inn

V Café, Guildford Institute

Appendix 3: Research participants

A total of 26 interviews were conducted with older people in four venues in Tower Hamlets (n=14) and in three venues in Guildford (n=12) between March and May 2023. Except for the four people interviewed in The Nelson's pub, which only opens at 5pm, all participants were interviewed between 10 am and 4pm.

A total of twenty-two participants were aged between 65-74 years with only four participants aged over 75 years. Of the latter, only one participant was from Guildford, which may reflect some of the challenges that less-mobile people might have in getting to hospitality venues in the area. Similar numbers of men and women took part in the research; 9 men and 5 women took part in East London and 7 men, and 5 women took part in Guildford. Interestingly, all the participants interviewed in the Marquis of Cornwallis and Lorenzo's café were men whereas the gender of participants in the other venues was more mixed. Both venues appeared to be popular with men, possibly with the former being described as a traditional drinking establishment and the latter being located away from the main shopping area.

Almost all participants identified as white English, white, or white 'other' with only one identifying as Latin American (East London). Thirteen participants were married or in a civil partnership, five participants (all in East London) were widowed, one was living with their partner, one was separated and six were single. Although participants were not asked whether they lived with any other family members, based on relationship status alone almost two thirds of participants in East London were living by themselves compared with one quarter of those in Guildford.

Most participants had lived in the local community all their lives or for more than twenty years (10 in East London and 11 in Guildford). Three participants had lived in East London between ten and twenty years, and only one had lived in the area between five and ten years. One participant in Guildford had moved to the area within the past five years. Many participants had known the venue where they were regulars and had been interviewed for several years, some even for decades.

Two couples took part in the research in Guildford; all four participants were customers of the Star Inn but were interviewed individually in the pub. The interviews in Guildford took between 42-91 minutes with an average duration of 59.5 minutes. Interviews in East London took between 18-60 minutes with an average duration of 31 minutes.

Acknowledgements

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