



## Towards an Age Friendly Housing Estate

Castlefen | Sallins | County Kildare



## Acknowledgements

The work on developing Castlefen as the first Age Friendly Estate was supported by the Kildare Age Friendly Alliance, Castlefen Residents Association, Kildare County Council (especially their Community Workers and Age Friendly Programme Manager) and Age Friendly Ireland's regional manager for the South East.



Comhairle Contae Chill Dara  
**Kildare County Council**

## Introduction

When residents of a local authority housing estate wanted to make improvements in their local community, they turned to their Age Friendly Programme to see how the estate could be a community for all ages.

Age Friendly Programmes are designed to assist ageing populations to live in their own community as active, valued members and to remain in their own homes for as long as possible. By focusing on the diverse needs of older people, the Age Friendly approach improves communities for all generations.

## Population Ageing

Like many other countries, Ireland is experiencing an ageing population. People are living longer, and the birth rate is declining, which increases the proportion of the population in older age. The World Health Organisation has called on countries to prepare for this demographic shift by focusing on the needs of older people across eight domains as illustrated in the diagram below:



This case study looks at how a local authority housing estate in County Kildare sought to make changes under these domains to improve the quality of life of older residents.

## Age Friendly Ireland

Age Friendly Ireland (AFI) is a local government shared service that supports all 31 local authorities to implement a strategic Age Friendly Programme, involving the public sector, private sector, academics and voluntary groups along with older citizens as co-design partners. AFI manages Ireland's affiliation to the World Health Organization's Global Network for Age Friendly Cities and Communities.



**WHO Global Network  
for Age-friendly Cities  
and Communities**



## Kildare Age Friendly Programme

Kildare is a long standing member of the Age Friendly movement, now on its fourth successive Age Friendly Strategy. The vision is to ensure a more socially inclusive approach throughout all age friendly work in the county. As life expectancy increases, the onus is on society to adapt in a manner that provides older people with the physical, social, economic, and cultural opportunities to ensure they enjoy the best quality of life.

Kildare Age Friendly Alliance members include representatives of the local authority, An Garda Síochána, Kildare/Wicklow Education and Training Board, TFI Local Link, Maynooth University, Kildare Older People's Council and other stakeholders.

As we looked around our estate, we realised our friends and neighbours were fast approaching old age. As a result, we decided to be pro-active and put some measures in place to make Castlefen a more age friendly estate. With the assistance of our Community Worker and the Kildare Age Friendly Programme we set out on a journey to become the first Age Friendly estate in Ireland.

We realised that we are all growing older at the same time, and we wanted to future proof Castlefen to be Age Friendly. We are very proud of the progress we are making in all areas and we are doing our best to provide positive experiences for everyone within our estate.

John Mc Loughlin,  
Chairperson of Castlefen  
Residents Association



### Castlefen Housing Estate

Castlefen is a local authority housing estate in Sallins, County Kildare. It is a mature estate that was developed in the 1990s. It is a three phase development with newer housing now integrated into the existing mature housing. The residents have a strong community spirit and were motivated towards making their estate Age Friendly, a place where older residents feel included, valued and supported.

**Castlefen has a population of 526 persons, with 8% over 55 years old and 7% with a registered disability. Over half the population of Castlefen is between 20 and 55, which would indicate a likelihood of a larger older population in the estate in the future. The population of Sallins town is 5,849 persons, 9% of whom are aged over 55 and 10% have a disability.**





The residents of Castlefen Housing Estate, Sallins became aware of the need to improve the lives of their neighbours who are of advancing years by making their public realm more accessible for them. They wanted older residents to be able to move around freely within their estate and to feel confident and safe in their community. Starting with footpaths, walkways and age friendly parking, they sought to develop Castlefen as a user-friendly environment. It was important to make the community centre more physically accessible whilst also providing more features to create a comfortable environment. They desired to make the experience for older people as inclusive as possible both in their public realm and in terms of social participation by including older people in all their social events.

Castlefen is a nice place to live, great community involvement, I really hope this audit highlights the small things and sorts them out – we want Castlefen to be a better place to live

CASTLEFEN RESIDENT

It has been a pleasure to work with the community of Castlefen Sallins and the key service providers in the area. In working towards making the estate an Age Friendly environment, Castlefen will become one of the first Age Friendly housing estates in Ireland. This will create a more cohesive and inclusive community where all residents can walk about and move with ease accessing the amenities and public realm and wider town supports, making Castlefen a great estate in which to grow old and age in place.

ALICE CORBETT

Age Friendly Ireland Regional Manager

## Four stage process

The World Health Organisation sets out a four stage process for Age Friendly recognition. Residents of Castlefen followed this process.

### STEP ONE Engage and Understand

- ▶ Set up a local steering or working group
- ▶ Perform participatory age-friendly assessments
- ▶ Conduct a baseline assessment with a healthy ageing profile
- ▶ Present and disseminate the assessment
- ▶ Gain political commitment

### STEP TWO Plan Strategically

- ▶ Unite partners behind a common vision
- ▶ Analyse strengths and weaknesses and define priorities
- ▶ Develop a comprehensive strategy, defining overall goals and time frame
- ▶ Define objectives and get approval
- ▶ Define responsibilities

### STEP THREE Act and implement

- ▶ Design an operational plan
- ▶ Consult on the action plan and involve older people at all stages
- ▶ Secure support and resources
- ▶ Scale up successful actions

### STEP FOUR Evaluate and monitor progress

- ▶ Create partnerships with universities and research institutions
- ▶ Monitor processes continually
- ▶ Undertake outcome and impact evaluation
- ▶ Sustain and improve actions informed by evidence
- ▶ Learn from successful actions in national and international networks

## Step 1 Engage and Understand

Castlefen Community Group in association with Kildare Age Friendly Alliance and Kildare County Council aim to become one of Ireland's first Age-Friendly Estates. Kildare Age Friendly Alliance agreed that a walkability audit should take place in Castlefen. With support from the Community Worker from Kildare County Council, a core group of residents started to engage with the local community.

They undertook a walkability audit of the estate to identify the positive features and issues to improve in July 2019. Participants included the Kildare Age Friendly Programme Manager, residents of the estate, the Community Worker for Castlefen, a member of the Gardai, a representative of Tuath Housing Association and planning consultant Derek Whyte. The group walked the entire estate and observed and identified physical barriers to the older residents to walk freely around their neighbourhood. Older residents, with varying degrees of mobility, participated fully with the audit.

A walkability audit can pinpoint small deliberate design changes that are required, with the needs of older people in mind. These changes can help older people to get out and about, keep them active and therefore greatly improve older people's lives. Small interventions can collectively add to an area's age-friendliness over a period of time.

The ethos of being Age Friendly is about creating inclusive opportunities across the lifecourse, by harnessing the wisdom and lived experience of older people:

**'If you design for the young you exclude the old, but if you design for the old you include everyone.'**

Afterward a de-briefing meeting was held with participants where the issues raised during the walkability were discussed and noted. These notes, comments and observations informed the content of this report.







## Step 2 Plan Strategically

The second step was to develop a plan for improving the estate. Thoughtful forward planning and careful consideration in relation to spatial layout and inclusion of specific features can greatly increase the walkability of an area. Small changes, such as public seating, can mean big differences to older people.

The action plan was published in 2020.

Starting with the footpaths, walkways and age friendly parking, the plan focused firstly on the accessibility of the built environment. The action plan also looked at the suitability of seating, written material and general community supports available on the estate.



### Top steps identified in the action plan:

- ▶ Accessible pedestrian route through the estate
- ▶ Crossing points and entrance to the estate
- ▶ Condition of footpaths
- ▶ Parking
- ▶ Aesthetics – the look and feel of the area
- ▶ Public spaces and buildings including the community centre

### Step 3 Act and Implement

The actions delivered under this plan included the following

- 1 The **entrance** was very busy and car-orientated. It needed to be made safer for pedestrians, cyclists, and other road users and in particular mobility aid users. This action resulted in speed bumps and dished kerbing to improve safety and accessibility.

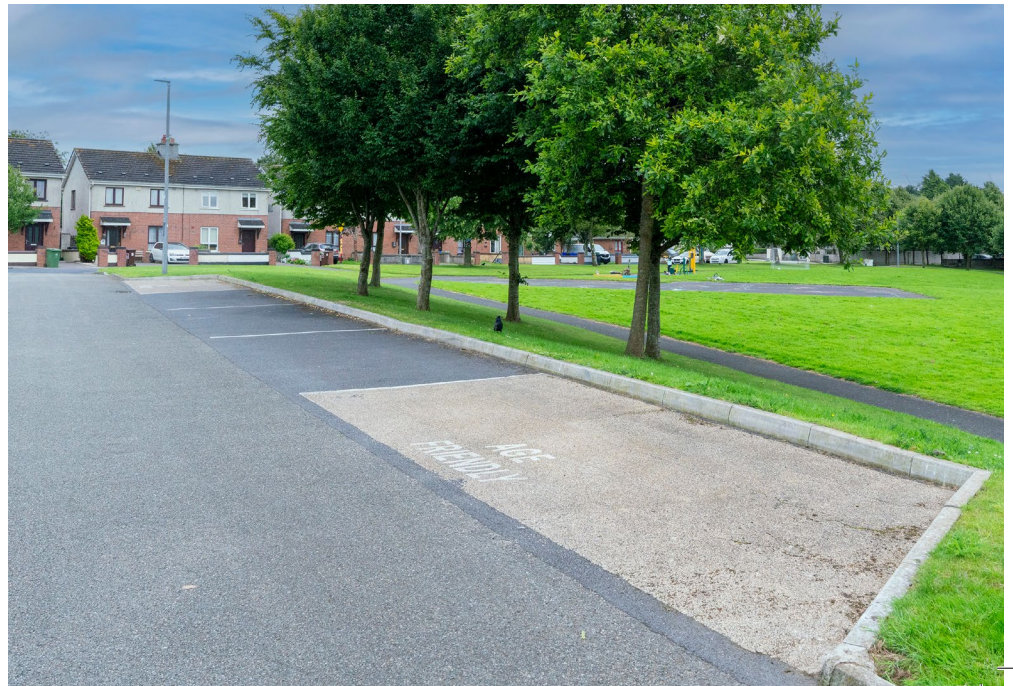




- 2 The community identified localised poor areas of footpaths. **Re-surfacing** was completed to address problem areas, leading to a continuous accessible route through the estate

- 3 **Car parking** in the estate was problematic, with inconsiderate choices by some residents impacting on older residents and people with disabilities. The committee launched an awareness campaign about road safety and the need for accessibility.

- 4 A number of dedicated **Age Friendly Parking Bays** were installed to create safer locations for older residents to park near to their homes.



- 5 The existing **public lighting** at the back of the estate was considered insufficiently bright with potential to facilitate anti-social behaviour. The action was to upgrade and improve the lighting in the area.



- 6 The walkway was not well used and the space had no passive surveillance. Re-design of this area included the installation of **outdoor gym equipment** creating a new focal point and space for community interaction.

- 7 The main pathway from the green space to the amenity area required improvements. Re-surfacing, edging and general maintenance are now up to high standard.





Speaking at the launch of the new units, then Taoiseach Micheál Martin said

“Modern, safe and secure homes such as the ones delivered here at Castlefen are instrumental in fostering sustainable communities.

I hope the security and comfort that they provide, backed by the support of Tuath, Kildare County Council and an active resident’s association, will continue to make this a vibrant and caring place to live for all residents, new and old.”

- 8 A range of additional community supports were set up for residents including a regular newsletter, food hampers and welfare checks during Covid, help with form filling and many other social supports.
- 9 Actions were delivered to address **housing**. The community worked closely with Kildare County Council’s housing department to address vacancy. An infill development of 29 new units for Tuath Housing were constructed in the existing residential neighbourhood of Castlefen. The houses were designed by Van Dijk Architects to be suitable for people of all ages and support ageing in place, in terms of level access and outdoor connectivity.



- 10 The development of an **Age Friendly Garden** with new planting and accessibility works. This garden space has considerable goodwill and engagement and is a good example of how small interventions can help develop community spirit.





- 11 The **community centre** required accessibility works. This was completed, along with other changes such as more suitable chairs and proofing all their written material to meet Age Friendly requirements.

The community centre also provides supports for young people in the estate including a Youth Work Service, afterschool clubs, summer projects and a youth choir.

- 12 Integration of **age friendly features** such as planting, seating and car parking with the new housing development.
- 13 **Age Friendly seating** was required in Castlefen. This is seating with arm rests and backrests that is a suitable height for older people and in a good location.



## Step 4 Evaluate and Monitor

All activity to develop Castlefen as the first Age Friendly Housing Estate is monitored on an ongoing basis by the Residents Association and the community worker assigned by Kildare County Council. It is co-ordinated under the Kildare Age Friendly Strategy by the Age Friendly Programme Manager.

There is now a process of continuous improvement in place, with Castlefen going forward for national awards for Pride of Place.





## Conclusion – Moving Towards an Age Friendly Estate

Castlefen Residents Association set out with the intention of making Castlefen a great place for its older residents to happily live for the rest of their lives in a safe and inclusive environment. Many changes were made by the Residents Association with support from the local authority and other groups. The way they conduct their business now is totally mindful of older residents who are supported to participate in all aspects of community life.

An improved public realm element was a vital component for Castlefen Residents Association in making their estate age friendly. The walkability audit process was essential in helping them to achieve this aim.

The emphasis on Castlefen becoming an Age Friendly Estate is based on public participation and the integration of the community, focusing community spirit to drive the project.









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