



Towards an Age Friendly Racecourse

Naas Racecourse | A Case Study in Practice

Ireland's First Age Friendly Racecourse





Acknowledgements

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**Naas
Racecourse**



**Comhairle Contae Chill Dara
Kildare County Council**



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Message from

Chair of Kildare Age Friendly Alliance

The Age Friendly concept is well established, particularly in County Kildare.

At its core is a recognition that the older cohort in our society should have the best possible opportunity to live their lives to the fullest and that the facilities and supports are available to enable them to do that.

Fulfilling this ambition is no simple challenge and requires the involvement of a range of agencies and organisations, especially at local level. Thankfully, people are living longer and the

majority are active and engaged members of society. Many are racing enthusiasts and that is why this initiative on the part of Naas Racecourse is so significant. What we are witnessing is the practical application of the Age Friendly concept in a well-established local racetrack with a proud tradition.

All involved in stepping up to achieve this recognition deserve great credit.

John Malone



Message from

Chairman of Naas Racecourse

Naas Racecourse is delighted to be awarded Age Friendly recognition and will proudly display our Age Friendly Charter. Working with the team at the Kildare Age Friendly Programme has opened our eyes to how small changes can make a huge difference in welcoming all age groups to the racecourse. The racecourse is a wonderful location for people to experience an active, social, cultural and sporting occasion. The older community in Kildare and beyond have always been great supporters of Naas Racecourse and some of the changes we have made will hopefully make their experience here all the more enjoyable. The board of directors and team here at Naas Racecourse are keen to build on these initial improvements over the coming years as we continue to develop and upgrade the racecourse.

Dermot Cantillon

Chairman of Naas Racecourse



Introduction

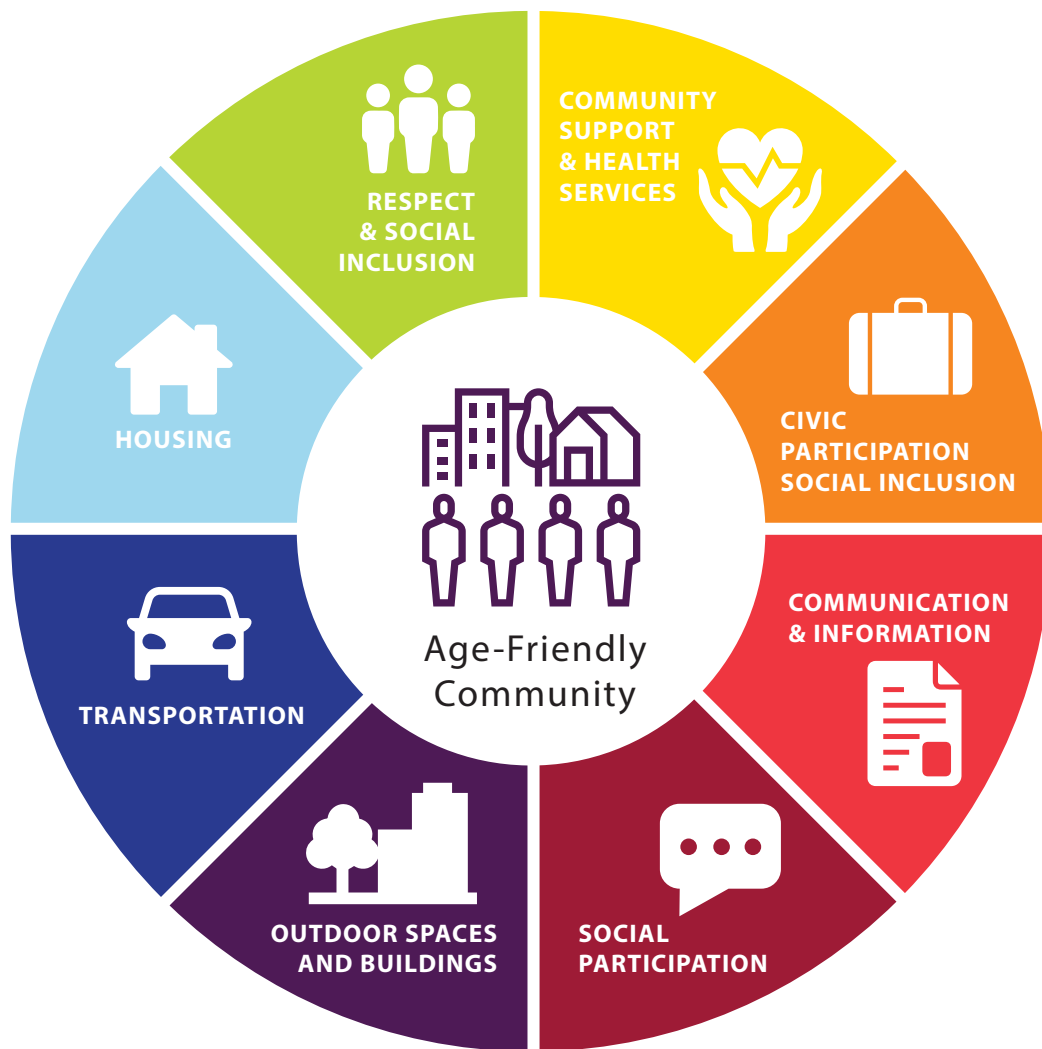
Ireland is acknowledged as the first Age Friendly Country in the world by the World Health Organisation [WHO], on account of the approach taken to preparing for an ageing population. Across all administrative areas of the country, there is an active Age Friendly Programme leading a strategic plan of work to support older people in their communities.

Each local authority is affiliated to the WHO's Global Network for Age Friendly Cities and Communities. The WHO places special emphasis on the creation of Age Friendly Environments as a key step in supporting the development of sustainable communities that will facilitate the ageing population. Age Friendly Environments is one of the action areas of the United Nation's Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030). By adapting our built and social environments in line with older people's needs, we can create communities that support social participation across the lifecycle.

This case study documents how the WHO four stage process was adapted by the Kildare Age Friendly Programme and Naas Racecourse to future proof the sports facility for ageing.

Age Friendly Ireland

Age Friendly Ireland 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 Organisation's Global Network for Age Friendly Cities and Communities. This global movement defines Age Friendly Communities under eight domains of action, as illustrated on the next page.



This national Age Friendly shared service office manages a range of programmes that support Ireland to prepare for population ageing, and services that directly support older people, under these eight domains.

Why have an Age Friendly Racecourse?

The World Health Organisation as part of its Age Friendly Cities and Communities programme identified the importance of social and recreational activities in the lives of older people to enable them to live long and healthy lives in their communities. Naas Racecourse provides opportunities for people to enjoy social and recreational amenities not just on race days but also through a range of Community Days and by making facilities available for community groups when required.

Horse Racing Ireland's Strategic Plan 2020-2024 identifies strategic priorities for the industry around participation (improving the racing experience for all participants) and broadening interest and appeal (raising the profile and attractiveness of the sport to customers and growing the audience).

A key priority is to:

“ . . . Lead on and develop positive initiatives that solve or address social issues and environmental challenges. The only way that these challenges can be solved is if stakeholders across the industry work together to implement practices and create solutions.”

Horse Racing Ireland 2023

Kildare Age Friendly Programme

The Kildare Age friendly Programme is a multi-sectoral collaboration spearheaded by Kildare County Council. The vision of the Kildare Age Friendly Strategy is to adapt society in a manner that provides older people with the physical, social, economic, and cultural opportunities to ensure they enjoy the best quality of life.

Of relevance to this case study, objectives of the Kildare strategy include the following measures:

- ▶ Continue to integrate Age Friendly Design Principles into the development of public spaces in Kildare.
- ▶ Pursue several flagship best practice initiatives in Age Friendly Spaces.
- ▶ Reduce the isolation and loneliness that many older people experience.
- ▶ Create increased opportunities for social participation through regular Age Friendly events and activities.

The Kildare Age Friendly Alliance identified Naas Racecourse as a key piece of infrastructure in the county that would benefit from a dedicated programme of work to achieve Age Friendly status. They agreed a joint ambition to make the racecourse the first Age Friendly Racecourse in Ireland. With support from the Age Friendly Shared Service national office, the WHO four stage process was adapted to suit the racecourse. The process was co-designed with older people, people with disabilities and the racecourse manager.

This case study will set the benchmark for other facilities of this type to follow.



Naas Racecourse

County Kildare has a rich history in horse-breeding and horse-racing with many equestrian centres in the locality. The origins of Naas Racecourse date back to a humble racing track in a busy market town. In 1922, the 'Naas Race Company' bought just over 100 acres of farmland and set about creating a proper racecourse. The very first meeting took place in June 1924, making 2024 the Centenary Anniversary for the racecourse.

Leading up to the 100th year anniversary, the Racecourse took the opportunity to review its

facilities and services. It aimed to future-proof its offering for the next 100 years. Implementing this important programme of work positions the racecourse to face the changing profile of the community in the coming decades.

Naas Racecourse is much more than a sporting venue. It is immersed in the heart of the community, opening its doors to a wide range of community projects and educational initiatives. It has a track record in engaging with the community of County Kildare.



Some projects to date include:

- ▶ Grandparent and community days that offer free family entertainment and experiences for all community members.
- ▶ A project in partnership with Down Syndrome Kildare where service users complete horticulture courses. The flowers are then displayed in the parade ring on race days for all to see.
- ▶ Local Men's Sheds and Women's Sheds avail of the venue's facilities.
- ▶ Another great community initiative is the Parkrun that takes place each Saturday morning.
- ▶ Racedays involve additional efforts and concessions for older visitors - a separate turnstile is in use for older people along with a concession on all tickets.
- ▶ Cash is still used and will remain in use for all race goers.
- ▶ A shuttlebus is supplied by the track from several access points around Naas and Sallins. This was very popular and was greatly appreciated by Walkability Audit participants.
- ▶ Future proposals are being considered to allow local sporting groups such as rugby and soccer to utilise the grass areas as overflow pitches due to the increase demand on amenities in the area.



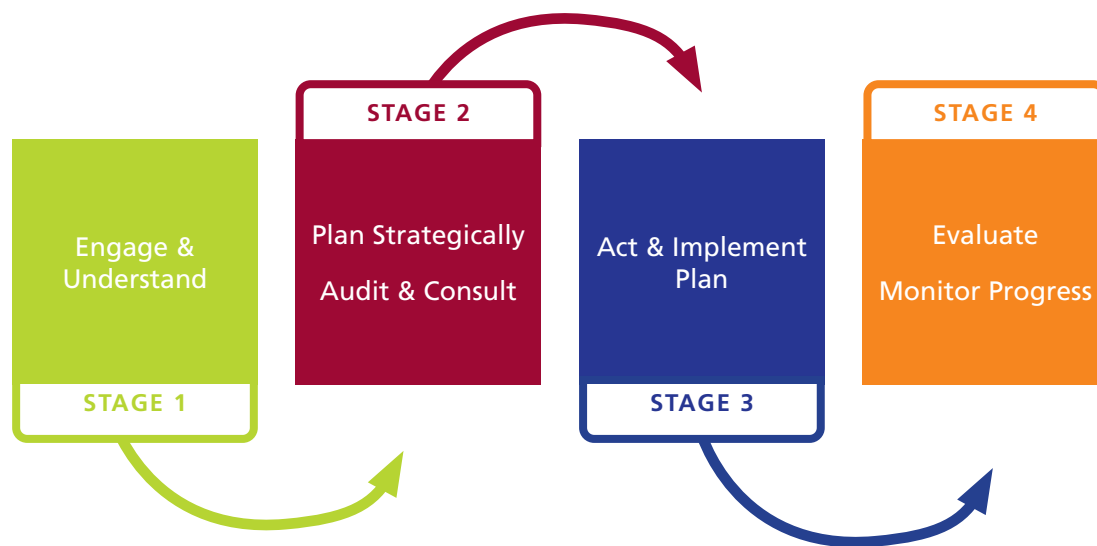
Becoming an Age Friendly Facility

Age Friendly Ireland is the custodian of the recognition process for Age Friendly facilities in Ireland. In order to be recognised as an age friendly premises, Naas Racecourse needed to undertake the WHO four stage process for Age Friendly recognition.

This involves setting up a steering committee, consulting with older customers and other stakeholders, carrying out a walkability audit, developing and implementing an action plan and evaluating the process.

The practical application of the WHO four stage process involved these steps:

Age Friendly 4 Stage Process



Stage 1

- ▶ Work with the Age Friendly Alliance to identify the racecourse project.
- ▶ Engage with the manager and relevant stakeholders.
- ▶ Agree project with Age Friendly Ireland and sign the MOU.

Stage 2

- ▶ Set up steering group with the manager of the racecourse.
- ▶ Unite everyone behind a common vision.
- ▶ Carry out a walkability audit representative of older people, people with accessibility challenges and include key stakeholders.

Stage 3

- ▶ Present the report to the Racecourse Manager and the Alliance for approval.
- ▶ Define responsibilities and time frame.
- ▶ Design a workplan with key stakeholders in consultation with the Racecourse Manager.
- ▶ Involve older people at all stages.
- ▶ Secure support and resources where possible.
- ▶ Implement the actions.

Stage 4

- ▶ Monitor progress continually.
- ▶ Once completed send report to AFI for accreditation.
- ▶ Arrange launch event to confer Age Friendly Status.

STAGE 1 Engage and Understand

The first step in the process was to secure commitment from all parties. The Kildare Age Friendly Programme agreed a working relationship with Naas Racecourse. The Board of Management were briefed by the Racecourse Manager. The Kildare Age Friendly Programme Manager was the point of contact between the local authority, Older People's Council and the racecourse.

Once the project was agreed, the Age Friendly Regional Manager and the Kildare Age Friendly Programme Manager met with the Racecourse Manager to set up a walkability audit. Walkability audits are a community-based assessment of a local area or built environment from the perspective of older people and people with disabilities. This process allows citizens to input their views to the design of their local environments.

The walkability audit took place on 8th December 2023 on a cold, wet and windy day.



Participants included members of Naas Access Group and Kildare Older People's Council, Naas Racecourse General Manager, Kildare Age Friendly Programme Manager and Age Friendly

Ireland Regional Manager. The group included people with reduced mobility, vision impairment and a carer.

The group walked the entire area and visited key buildings. The completion of the walkability audit was very informative, and a range of issues were discussed and analysed by the participants and the relevant stakeholders. A workshop was held on the same day as the audit, to allow for detailed discussion with participants.

On the day of the audit the 'look and feel' of the racetrack was discussed. Participants commented on the warm, welcoming feeling. The venue was clean, well presented and offered so much to race goers. Importantly, on non-racing days it opens its doors to the local community.

Overall, access to the racecourse and grandstand were scored as 'good', and the layout and visitor experience also scored 'good'.

The walkability audit identified the following positive features, along with a list of areas that could be adapted to be more Age Friendly.

“ *The Racecourse really does provide that 'Fáilte Feeling to all* **”**
Older People's Council Member

From car park to main entrance:

- ▶ Good accessibility of footpaths
- ▶ Excellent signage in some (but not all) areas
- ▶ Pricing and payment information available in all formats
- ▶ Manual turnstiles used with a special accessible entrance suitable for older people and people with disabilities
- ▶ Parking assistance provided by ground staff

Within the venue:

- ▶ Accessible layout of internal environment
- ▶ Order or Malta staff (First Aid) on site for race days and community events
- ▶ Accessible toilet facilities with emergency call button

STAGE 1

STAGE 2

STAGE 3

STAGE 4



Visitor Experience:

- ▶ Concessions for older people
- ▶ Facility is well maintained
- ▶ Seating available
- ▶ Ticketing is easy to acquire

Transport Links:

- ▶ Good public transport links with a feeder bus to and from Naas town on race days

The existing signage for local transport links is well located and easy to read.

STAGE 2

Plan Strategically

The walkability audit identified a number of areas where improvements could be made to the racecourse to improve the experience of older customers. Using a co-design approach, a walkability audit report was drawn up with a list of recommendations. This became the plan to determine the existing issues that impact on the walkability of the racecourse's public access spaces, both internal and external.

By understanding the issues and putting steps in place to address them, the Racecourse continued on its journey towards full Age Friendly recognition.

The types of issues identified on the day included:

From the car park to the main entrance

- ▶ Clearer wayfinding signage needed in some areas
- ▶ Accessibility of entrance doors (automatic doors)
- ▶ Lack of Age Friendly parking and accessible parking

Within the Venue

- ▶ Limited signage to highlight wayfinding information to toilets, First Aid and restaurant
- ▶ Some entrance doors need a ramp for access
- ▶ Betting counters were too high for wheelchair users
- ▶ Insufficient seating / seating that does not have Age Friendly design (for example arm rests)

STAGE 1

STAGE 2

STAGE 3

STAGE 4

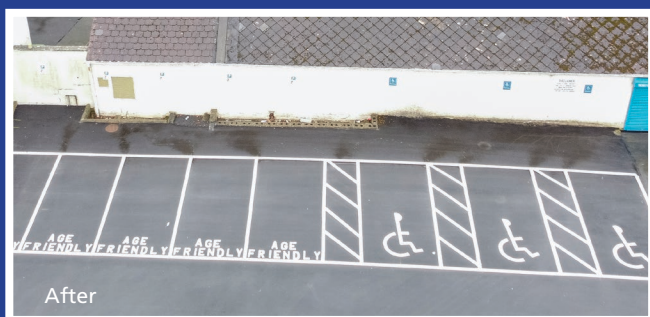
Visitor Experience

- ▶ Query on how accessible information about the venue is
- ▶ Limited access to playground for people using wheelchairs or mobility aids





Before



After



STAGE 3 Act and Implement

The action plan was presented to the Racecourse Manager and the Kildare Age Friendly Alliance to secure support and approval for staff and resources to be committed for implementation. An agreed list of responsibilities was developed into a work plan. Older people were involved at all stages of this process.

The following highlights some examples of the areas identified as the main barriers and solutions to enable Naas to become an age Friendly racecourse.

1 Age Friendly Parking and Accessible Parking Spaces

Dedicated Age Friendly and Accessible parking bays were provided at the racecourse, so that older patrons and people with disabilities can park nearer to the entrance. This reduces the distance that people with limited mobility need to walk to access the grandstand and grounds.

STAGE 1

STAGE 2

STAGE 3

STAGE 4

2 New Signage

New signage was erected in various areas to support wayfinding in the facility. Below are some examples of clear signage that includes pictures to assist people with literacy difficulties, cognitive impairment or speakers of foreign languages.



3 Age Friendly Seating

A range of new Age Friendly seating was installed around the racecourse. Age Friendly seating meets Universal Design standards in terms of dimensions and has arm rests and backrests to support older people to sit and rise independently.

The racecourse installed accessible picnic benches, timber Age Friendly benches on the grounds of the facility, and new arm chairs inside the building.

The accessible picnic table has space to allow a wheelchair user access the table.

These touches create a more accessible environment, enabling older people and people with disabilities to enjoy the experience in comfort.



STAGE 1

STAGE 2

STAGE 3

STAGE 4

4 Additional access to the playground

Access to the playground area was further developed so that older people and grandparents would be able to use the facility more easily. A small access path was provided at the edge of the playground, as a link for wheelchair users and people with buggies to the tarmac area.



5 Visual contrast on steps

Yellow paint lines were refreshed and added to the steps of stairs inside and steps outside in the public areas. This simple measure helps to demarcate changes in levels and is particularly useful for people with low vision.



6 Lower Betting Counters

Tote and betting counters were lowered to facilitate access by people using wheelchairs.



7 Meeting Point

A covered area was provided for race goers at the meeting point near the entrance to provide shelter.



STAGE 1

STAGE 2

STAGE 3

STAGE 4

8 New signage

A new lamppost sign was erected to highlight wayfinding to Toilets, Catering and First Aid facilities.



9 Ramps

Removable miniature ramps were provided at some doors for easier wheelchair access.



STAGE 4

Evaluate and Monitor Progress

The final stage in the WHO recognition process involves monitoring and evaluating the actions delivered. A report on activity was submitted to Age Friendly Ireland. The Kildare Age Friendly Programme will continue to engage with Naas Racecourse to ensure ongoing monitoring of their Age Friendly status and potential for further actions to support older people in the community.

The racecourse has additional goals that were not completed in this phase of work. The next phase, a longer term goal, will include the installation of automatic doors.



STAGE 1

STAGE 2

STAGE 3

STAGE 4

Conclusion

Naas Racecourse has set a great example of how to listen to the voice of older people in order to improve the horse-racing experience for patrons. Using the structure of the local Age Friendly Programme and the resources of World Health Organisation, the facility has demonstrated the process of adapting for ageing. Naas Racecourse is to be commended for its forward thinking in undertaking this work and for engaging with the community of its hinterland to ensure it remains a hugely valued asset for the community of County Kildare.



References

Horse Racing Ireland Strategic Plan 2020-2024

Deloitte (2023) Social and Economic Impact of Irish Thoroughbred Breeding & Racing

Age Friendly Kildare County Strategy 2023-2027





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