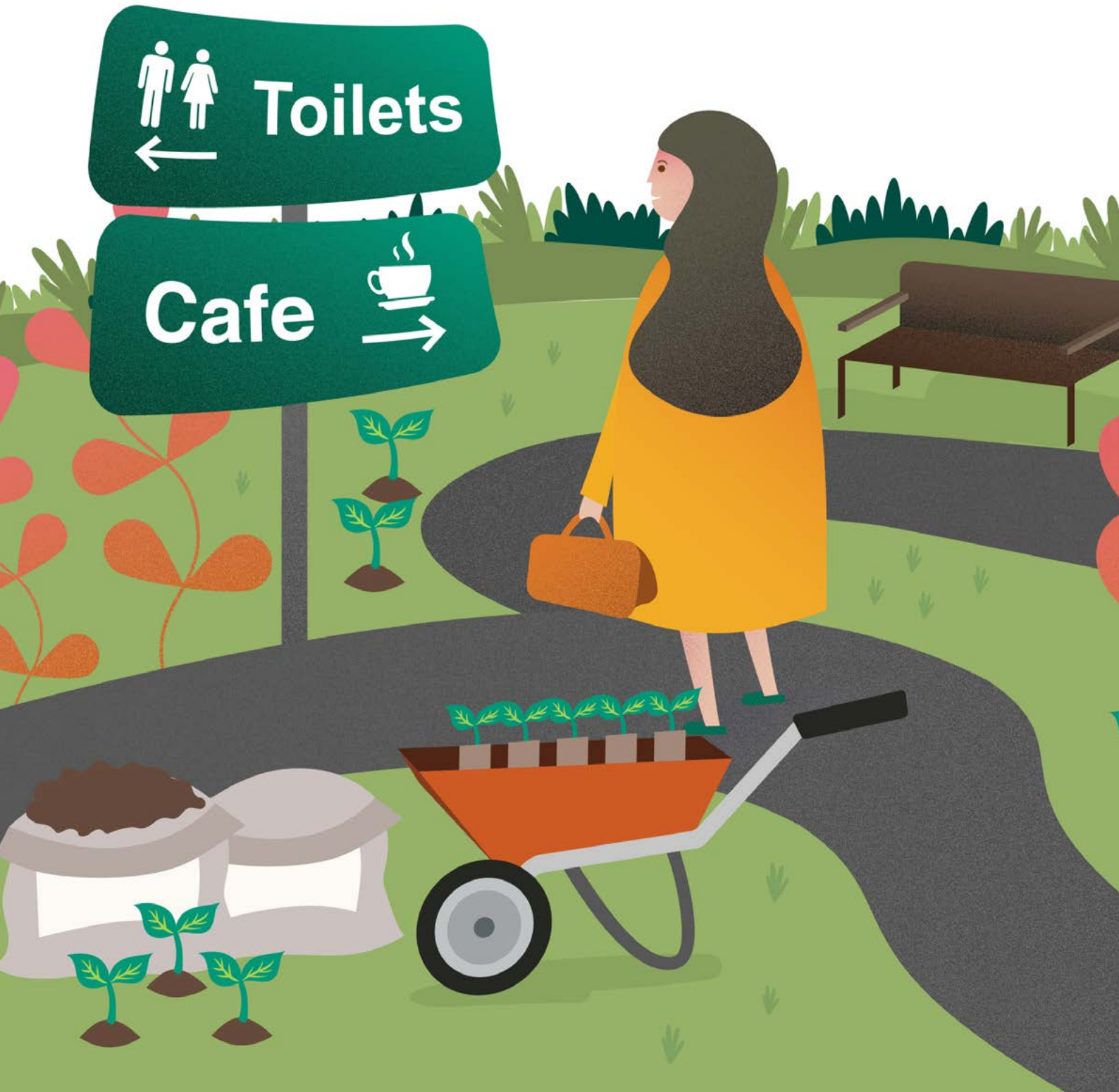
Dementia and the Outdoors Guidance Note

Dementia Friendly paths for all



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Introduction

Our vision is that everyone has the opportunity to be active every day, ensuring a happier, healthier and greener Scotland. We want to ensure that everyone living with dementia can enjoy the benefits of walking, being outdoors and connecting with nature. That's why we have been looking at how our paths and walking environments can be more welcoming to people living with dementia.

This guidance note offers recommendations for widening access to the outdoors, particularly for people with dementia and related cognitive and sensory challenges. It is intended as a guide for those working to improve accessibility to different types of greenspace, such as parks, gardens and woodlands that are already established or still at the planning stage.

There is a strong connection between nature and wellbeing. Our research has shown that spending time outside can provide many benefits for people living with dementia.

"It's lovely walking through the gardens seeing the plants and trees coming to life"

Participant, East Renfrewshire

Outdoor activity can provide both social and mental health benefits and improve physical wellbeing. It also facilitates social interaction and plays an important role in people remaining active within the wider community. However, sometimes being able to access and use outdoor spaces can be challenging, and efforts are needed reduce barriers to accessing the outdoors.

The Equality Act 2010 offers protection for people with disabilities, requiring people and organisations to make reasonable adjustments to remove barriers to accessing goods and services. The Scottish Government has also made dementia a national priority, and one of the key desired outcomes of Scotland's National Dementia Strategy is an increased number of dementia-friendly and dementia-enabled communities and initiatives.

The content of this document is based on a review of existing literature, research and guidance on designing for dementia. Consultations took place with professionals from fields relating to dementia friendly design, community environments and transport as well as people living with dementia and carers.

Barriers to access and wayfinding

Dementia can affect people in different ways. Many of the associated changes can contribute to wayfinding challenges. Short term memory and sensory challenges can all make it difficult to navigate the outdoor environment. Some people may also struggle with concentration and communication which can pose further challenges to navigating environmental barriers. For example, maps, timetables and signs may become more difficult to interpret.

Some of these challenges may be exacerbated by aspects of the physical environment. Signage can be unclear or lacking in prominent places. Toilet facilities may be difficult to locate and you may need to walk for longer to find a place to sit down and rest. Most of these issues can be solved with relatively small interventions to better suit everyone's needs.

There can also be social barriers to accessing the outdoors. Often people with dementia feel that they are no longer listened to or taken seriously as members of society. This can make it difficult to advocate for themselves and others with a diagnosis. Because of this, improvements to the physical environment go hand in hand with efforts to increase awareness of dementia, reduce the stigma amongst communities and advocate for the rights of those living with dementia.

Further Resources

Alzheimer's Scotland website

Dementia and Sensory challenges leaflet (Life Changes Trust)

Dementia Words Matter: Guidelines on language about dementia (DEEP)

National Standards for Community Engagement (SCDC)

General design guidelines

According to the Sensory Trust, a good starting point for any design is promoting integration rather than segregation and making sure that everyone has the same quality of experience. The best way to put this thinking into practice is through involving users with a range of experiences and abilities throughout the planning process, as well as sharing examples of good design and responding to common problems.

Design guidance focusing specifically on the needs of people with dementia has so far been limited to indoor spaces, often in hospital and care settings. Common considerations relate to lighting, colour and contrast, signage and symbols and other types of waymarkers. Many of these are equally relevant when designing for outdoor environments, but it comes with its own particular challenges and considerations.

"It is based on the simple principle that designing for the widest range of people creates better designs and benefits everyone."

A set of six design principles for Dementia Friendly Neighbourhoods (source: Mitchell and Burton, 2006) have been suggested. These relate to the particular wayfinding challenges experienced by people with dementia and are good to keep in mind during any place making process:

1. **Familiarity:** If the environment is familiar this makes it easier for people to find their way around.
2. **Legibility:** The environment should be easy for people to read and navigate.
3. **Distinctiveness:** Distinctive features capture people's attention and help with spatial orientation.
4. **Accessibility:** People of all abilities should be able to reach the places they need or want to go.
5. **Comfort:** People should be able to use the space without discomfort.
6. **Safety:** People should feel safe using the space.

Further Resources

Daylight Spaces design guide (Trust Housing Association)

Remodelling design guide (Trust Housing Association)

Dementia Enabling Environments website

Inclusive Design Toolkit (University of Cambridge)

Sensory Trust

The importance of consultation

When planning your project, it is important to consult with users from a variety of groups and with different needs. This helps create better places which more people will be able to use and enjoy. Involve the local community in the decision-making process from the start, as they can often offer valuable information and help with identifying potential problems and finding solutions that respond to these.

When holding a consultation event, it is helpful to consider the following:

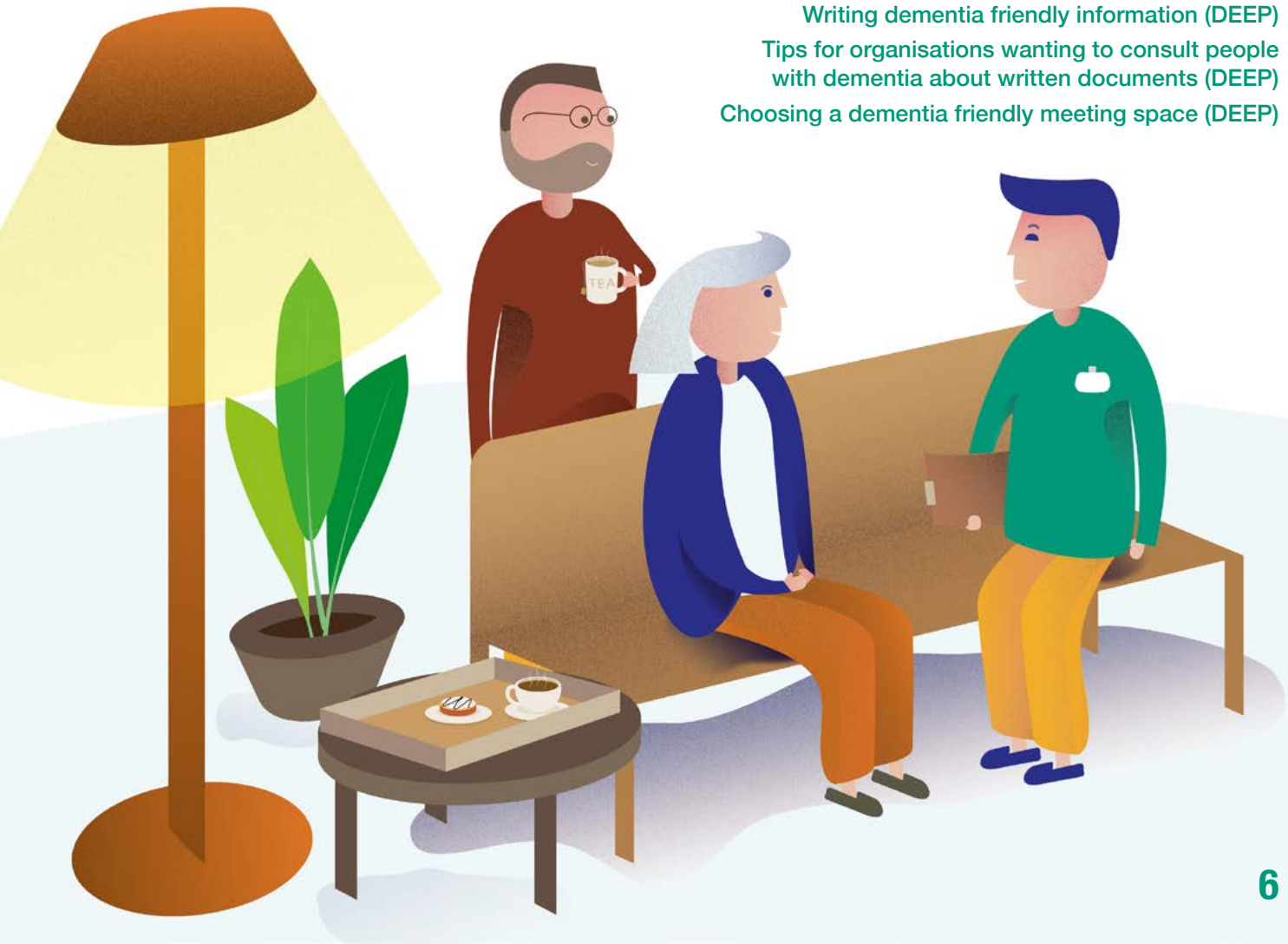
- Inform people well in advance and consider how this information is conveyed. Make sure any information is provided in a clear and legible format
- Make sure the location for the consultation event is accessible and friendly
- Be clear about why the consultation is taking place and what the desired outcomes are
- Encourage people to share their ideas and opinions and provide support for those who may have difficulties with communicating
- Find out about the needs of participants in advance
- Record any decisions that are made in writing
- Do a follow up to thank people for their input and keep them informed on progress

Further Resources

Writing dementia friendly information (DEEP)

Tips for organisations wanting to consult people with dementia about written documents (DEEP)

Choosing a dementia friendly meeting space (DEEP)



Signage and symbols

Signage is a common way of communicating information about the environment and helping people to find their way to and around a place. Signs can have many functions – they can inform, direct, identify and warn us. They help us know where we are and get to where we want to go. Signs often include both text and pictorial elements. People with dementia may rely to a greater extent on both of these kinds of information to navigate their surroundings. Because of this, it is important to consider whether signs do their job in communicating the information that users need. To achieve this, language should be clear and concise, only communicate the information that is necessary and be inclusive.

Important elements to consider:

Font: sans serif fonts such as Arial are generally preferred. Always use sentence case as it is the easiest form of words to read

Text size: An appropriate combination of large font and symbol should be used that are given equal prominence in the sign

Legibility: keep in mind the main points you are trying to communicate

Contrast: use colours that contrast the text against its background colour as well as the environment that it's situated in

Symbols

Symbols are images that can help us communicate information. Many commonly used symbols rely on learned associations, and for people with dementia there is often a loss of paired association. This can mean that there is no longer an association of a symbol of a man or a woman with a toilet. It is important that there is a clear relationship between a symbol and what it represents. More realistic symbols are easier to understand, and three-dimensional images have shown to be preferred. Pictorial elements on signs should be supported by text to emphasise the message and avoid confusion.

Colour and contrast

Colour contrast is particularly important when designing for older populations, people with dementia or visual impairments. It is common for contrast sensitivity to decrease with age, which means it can become more difficult to differentiate certain colours. Contrast between text/pictorial elements and the background is therefore important, and a simple colour palette is recommended. Also consider how the sign will stand out from the surroundings, and make sure it is not obscured by foliage and/or other objects. Avoid using reflective materials for signs as these can cause glare.

Black text and/ or symbols on a yellow background provides a strong contrast, this is helpful for people locating amenities from a distance. However, in closer proximity signs can use other colours as long as they are simple and contrasting against its situated environment. This is helpful when designing for a nature or woodland environment and there is a need to stay consistent with the feel of the surroundings.

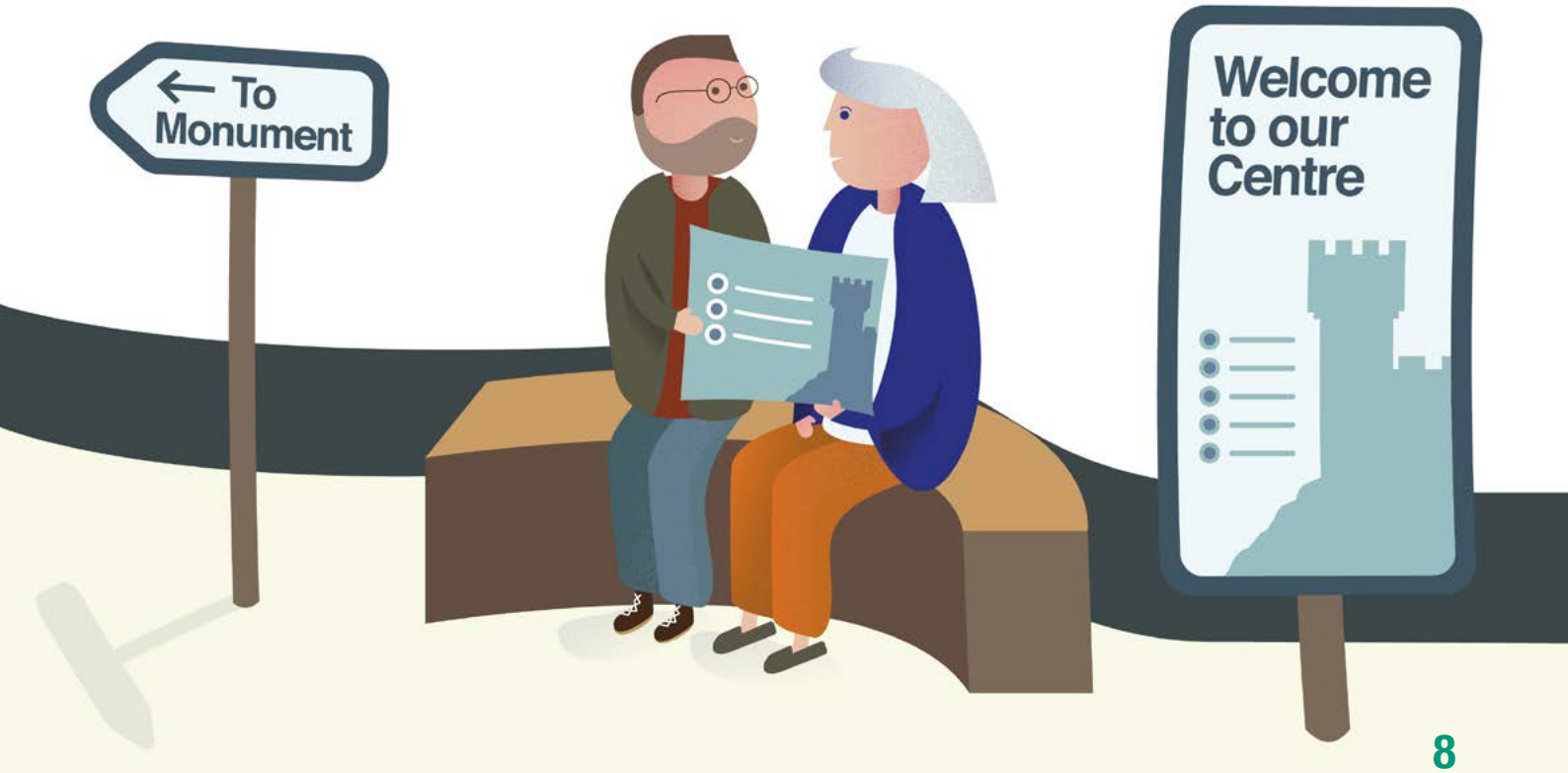
Placement

Think about where signs are placed, and the relation between the sign and the information it is referring to, a centered position if possible. Signs should be logically placed, to make sure they communicate what they are intending to. In case of directional signs, it should be clear where the sign is pointing and directional arrows should be close to the text, ideally on the same sign. Also consider the height at which the sign is placed; 1.2m measured from the ground will position signs within direct line of sight, as this is slightly below eye level. This is more comfortable and safe for older users, who do not need to look up to read the sign. It is important that signage is consistent across a site and used appropriately, as excessive or unclear signage may be as confusing as a lack of signage.

Further Resources

For People With Any Disability — Inclusive Symbols: Feasibility Research (Life Changes Trust and Studio LR)

Signage Guidance for Outdoor Access (Paths for All)



Other wayfinding aids

While signage is important it is not the only way in which environments can be navigated. When orienting ourselves in our surroundings and locating different places we rely either consciously and/or subconsciously on different features within the environment. The importance of landmarks for wayfinding has been emphasised. On a city scale these can be historical buildings or monuments, town squares, civic buildings, shops, other distinctive features or places of personal significance.

Waymarkers

Within a more confined space such as a park, certain features including planting, sculptures or benches can also help users orientate themselves. Where signs are not appropriate or desired, different types of waymarkers can be used to aid wayfinding. These may be particularly helpful at entrances and exits as well as path junction points. For example, where a path bends around a corner, visual cues can provide reassurance and provide information as to where it leads to. It is necessary to consider what is most appropriate for a specific environment and consider the needs of the users as well as the character of the place itself.

Sensory cues

Colour can be useful for highlighting certain routes or points of interest. In addition to visual cues, other types of sensory information can be helpful e.g. sounds, scents or materials. Hearing the sound of running water informs the user that they are approaching a river, and the scent of a familiar plant can help someone remember where they are. This kind of information may be of particular importance to people with visual impairments, and similar aids are already used at many pedestrian crossings/ traffic lights, where sound signals as well as textured paving are often used.

Layout

In addition to various types of environmental communication aids, the overall layout of a space plays a significant role for how easy it is for people to navigate. Having open spaces helps the user orientate themselves, and there should be few visual restrictions. Paths should be logically situated in relation to facilities and points of interest and should always lead somewhere. Dead ends should be avoided.

Further Resources

Colour and wayfinding design guide
(Trust Housing Association)

Consideration of sensory challenges

Sensory challenges are common amongst people with dementia, with changes in the way they see, hear or feel. Hypersensitivity to noise is common, as are changes in perception. Some people find they can no longer distinguish between hot and cold, and smells may suddenly become overpowering. Due to such changes, the outdoor environment with its multitude of sounds, smells and sensations can be overwhelming. It is good practice to provide places of calm within busier environments, provide opportunities for rest and recuperation and minimise unnecessary noise where possible. Planting can be useful for creating varied and diverse spaces and providing shelter. For example, a hedge can offer protection from noise, unpleasant views or cold winds.

Difficulties perceiving depth is a common problem. Darker areas on a lighter surface can be interpreted as holes or depressions along a path line. It is advisable to avoid busy patterns on the ground and to consider the placement of certain objects such as bins and seating, so that these do not cast shadows along paths. Shiny or reflective surfaces which may cause glare should also be avoided, as these can cause distress to people with increased sensitivity to light. Consider lighting particularly along paths. Having even lighting throughout the space is advisable.

It is also good practice to provide opportunities for pleasant sensory experiences. Sensory gardens of different kinds are increasingly popular and can provide many benefits to people with dementia. According to Sensory Trust a sensory garden is "a self-contained area that concentrates a wide range of sensory experiences." This can be achieved through varying surface materials and using planting with a variety of colours, scents and sounds. These may aid remembrance as well as provide talking points. Planting should be chosen to provide year-round interest, and plants that attract birds and wildlife are not only beneficial for biodiversity but can add to people's enjoyment of outdoor spaces. Raised beds can offer opportunities to engage more directly with plants and can aid activities such as gardening.

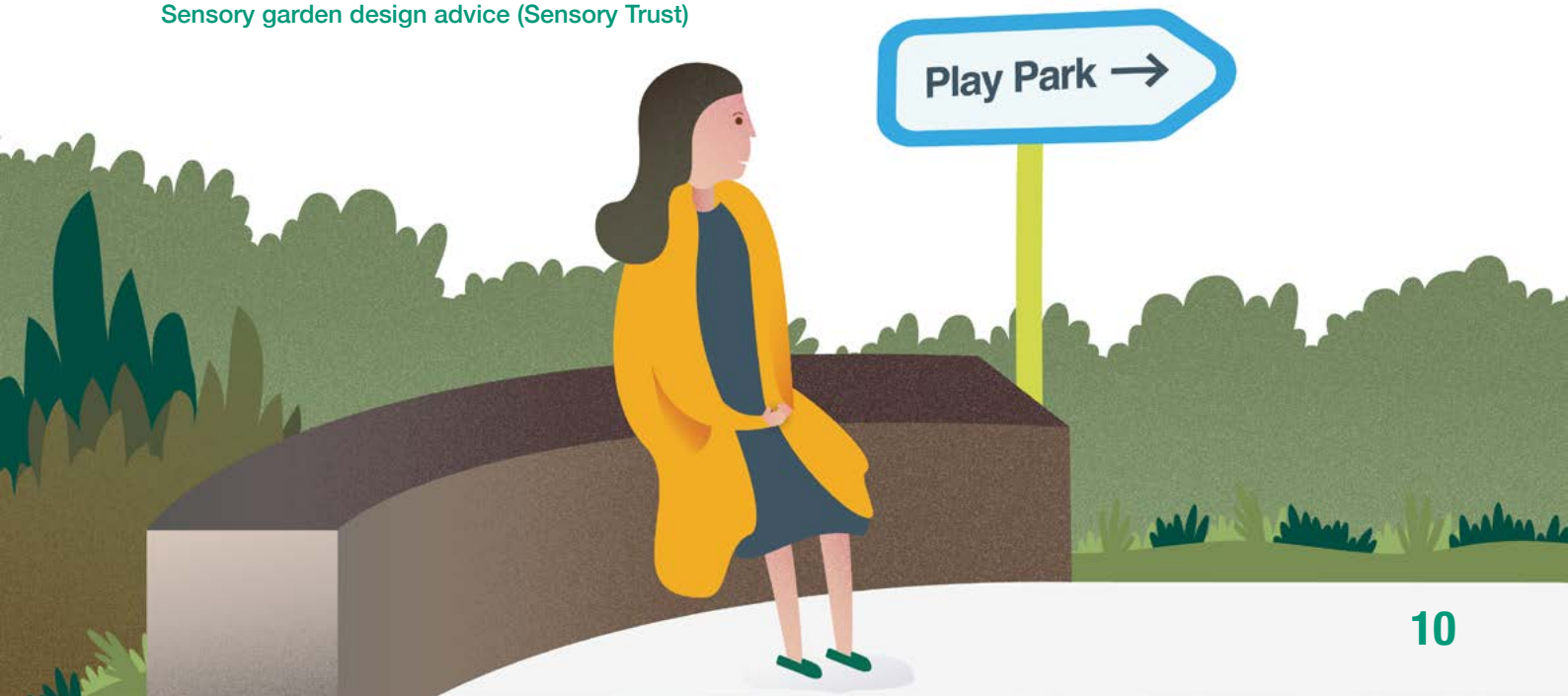
Further Resources

Daylight Spaces design guide (Trust Housing Association)

Sensory garden design advice (Sensory Trust)

"It's very relaxing hearing the wind in the trees"

Participant, Edinburgh and Lothian



Paths and facilities

Paths help to structure a space and get people where they want to go. Walking routes should be well-marked, with signs and/ or different waymarkers used where appropriate. Routes of different lengths should be provided and it is helpful to mark the length of routes; preferably in the time it takes to walk as well as the distance. Looped designs are particularly suited for people with dementia as these are easier to navigate. For paths to be accessible it is important to make sure they are well-defined and that there is clear contrast with the surroundings.

Path surfaces

All main routes should be safe to walk on and allow access for wheelchair users. Surfaces should be as even as possible. Think about how materials will 'behave' in different seasons and weather conditions, and also consider drainage along the path. When choosing materials, consider durability and the kind of use they will have to withstand. Factor in issues of maintenance; paths and street furniture should be regularly inspected. Keep walkways clean of leaf litter and keep vegetation from encroaching onto paths. Avoid planting trees right next to walkways as they can cause shadows and roots may come through and cause a trip hazard.

Seating

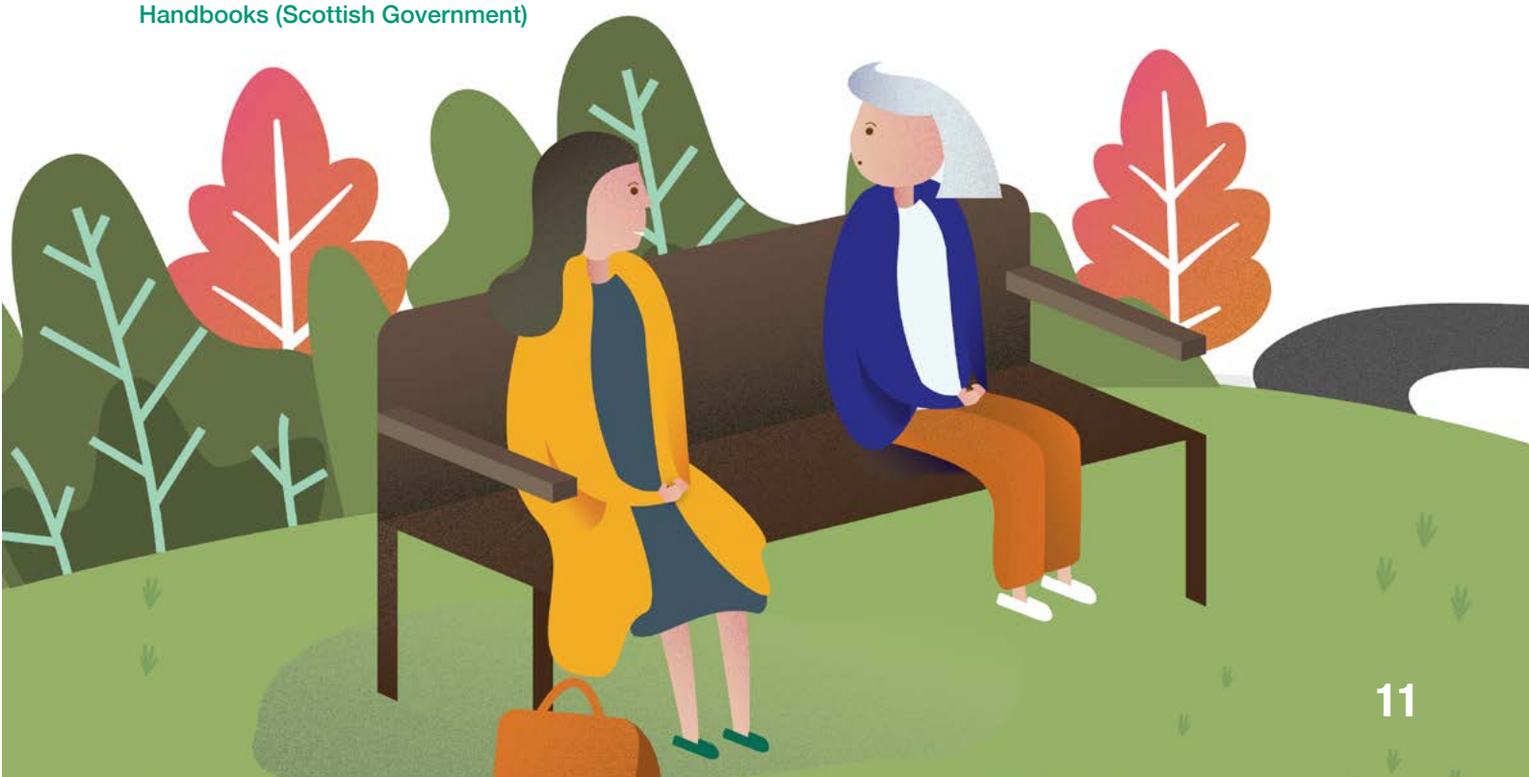
Seating should be provided at regular intervals to provide opportunities for people to rest and socialise. Benches should have arm and backrests, and there should be plenty of space for a wheelchair next to the bench. Individual seating is easier for people using wheelchairs to use and is also recommended. Consider how seating is placed and where (to what) it is facing. Tables are useful, as having a surface to put things down creates possibilities for different kinds of activities. Think about how street furniture stands out from its situated background and make sure there is sufficient colour contrast.

Facilities

It is advisable to inform users in advance of the kind of facilities available on site. Knowing what to expect upon arrival can be reassuring and helps people to prepare for potential issues, thus reducing barriers to access. Consider creating a dementia friendly designed leaflet or putting up an information board by the entrance. For example, knowing that there is toilet facilities on-site can help someone to feel more comfortable in visiting. Toilets should be well marked, accessible and easy to use, with appropriate signage provided. A simple intervention such as coloured toilet seats can make it easier for someone with dementia to use, as this aids with contrast against the floor.

Further Resources

Building Regulations Technical Handbooks (Scottish Government)



Transport

For many people living with dementia, getting to and from places is perhaps the biggest barrier to access. Some people may be able to get there on foot, while others may be able to drive, and some may be reliant on public transport. All of these methods can involve their own challenges. Using public transport can be a particular issue for older people, including people with dementia. Many people may be used to getting around by car and may not feel confident about using the bus. Timetables and maps may be difficult to decipher and often there is a lack of dementia awareness among some public transport operators.

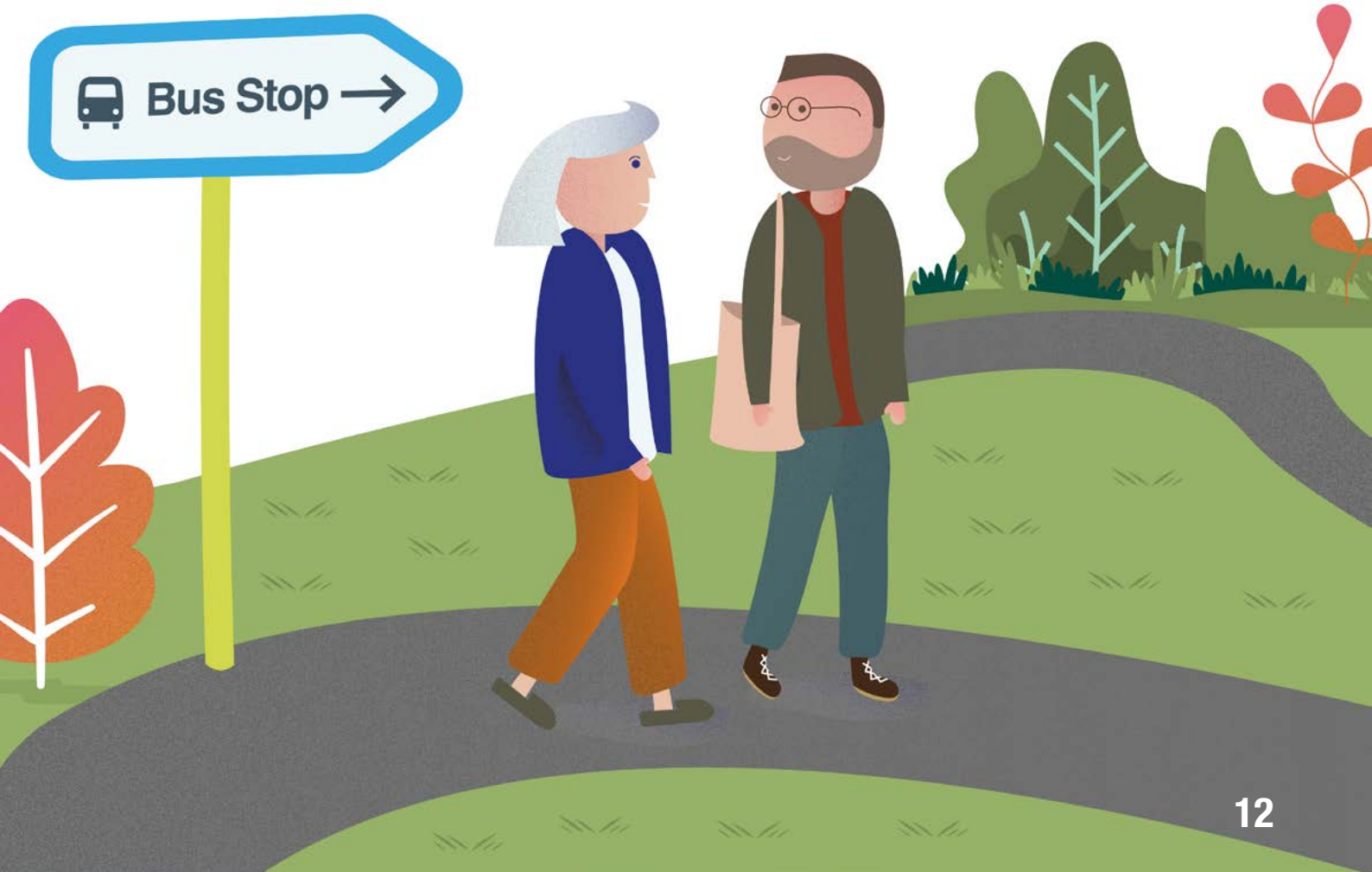
Further Resources

Go Upstream

Doing Transport Differently guide (Disability Rights UK)

There have been attempts to tackle such issues, for example through awareness training, however further improvements are needed from a practical and logistical perspective. Some bus companies have also introduced cards which people can show drivers on buses to make them aware of individual needs.

To ensure people can better access certain places think about local transport routes and by what method the majority of people will be arriving. Provide directions to the site from main access routes and nearby bus stops. There should also be guidance on how to 'get back' to these from within the site. Mark entrances and exits clearly. For those arriving by car, provide accessible parking. Improvements to road crossings and pavements can also help people get around in their community and access local greenspaces.



Audit tools

To make parks, woodlands and other kinds of greenspace more accessible, it is useful to assess potential challenges to gain a better understanding of where to focus your efforts. Various audit tools can provide a useful means of gauging people's opinions and thoughts, and provide a framework for discussion. The following tools may be helpful in different situations, depending largely on the specific project or audience.

The Place Standard Tool measures various factors of the physical as well as the social environment, such as public transport, facilities and amenities, social interaction, care and maintenance. While not specifically developed for the design of dementia friendly environments it provides a broad framework for assessing the overall quality of a place.

DEEP (The Dementia Engagement and Empowerment project) have developed a checklist specifically for dementia groups assessing how dementia-inclusive an outside space is. This checklist was created together with Professor Mary Marshall and tested and developed further by a number of dementia groups.

The Iridis App was developed by the Dementia Services Development Centre at the University of Stirling and is based on their Dementia Design Audit Tool. It uses dementia design principles to assess the environment. However, it is worth noting that not everyone has access to a smartphone or feels comfortable using digital technology.

Conclusions

There are no hard and fast rules for making an outdoor space more dementia friendly and accessible. A development process needs to be adopted where people are at the centre of consultation with every aspect. Utilising dementia friendly design principles will help to some extent but must be considered alongside the purpose, nature and practicalities of implementation if it is to be successful. It is not a straightforward process and may not address every challenge but making an outdoor space more accessible than it was before is ultimately a step in the right direction if it is to be welcoming and inclusive for everyone.

How to get in touch

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Paths for All Partnership is a registered Scottish charity No: SC025535 and a Company Limited by Guarantee No: 168554 incorporated 19 September 1996 at Companies House, Edinburgh, Registered Office: Kintail House Forthside Way, Stirling FK8 1QZ