



Street Design for Age Friendly Neighbourhoods

For older activists, local authority councillors and officers interested in how their street looks or those involved in redesigning or redeveloping streets in their community.

Author: Wendy Cocks

Acknowledgements: Thank you to members of Manchester Age Friendly Design Group for their helpful suggestions for additional references and to Newcastle University for their photograph of the Age Friendly seating they developed with Newcastle Elders.

Care & Repair England

Care & Repair England is an independent charitable organisation which aims to improve older people's housing. It believes that all older people should have decent living conditions in a home of their own choosing. It innovates, develops, promotes and supports practical housing initiatives & related policy and practice which enable older people to live independently in their own homes for as long as they wish, particularly for older people living in poor or unsuitable private sector housing.

Website: www.careandrepair-england.org.uk **email:** info@careandrepair-england.org.uk

Twitter: [@cr_england](https://twitter.com/cr_england)

Disclaimer

Care & Repair England has made every effort to ensure that the information and guidance in this publication were accurate when published, but can take no responsibility for the subsequent use of this information, nor for any errors or omissions it may contain. To the extent permitted by law, Care & Repair England shall not be liable for any loss, damage or expense incurred by reliance on the information or any statement contained herein.

Any References or third-party URLs are given for information and reference purposes only. Care & Repair England does not control or warrant the accuracy, relevance, availability, timeliness or completeness of the information contained on any third-party website. Inclusion of any third-party details or website is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, products or services offered, nor the companies or organisations in question.

Any views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the BRE who have solely provided national data concerning housing tenure, incidence of housing hazards, age, health and disability profile of heads of households and drawn on the work of the BRE Trust project 'The costs of poor housing to the NHS'.

Copyright © Care & Repair England 2016. No part of the document, including any illustrations or diagrams, may be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission.

Care & Repair England is a Registered Society with Charitable Status Reg. No. 25121R.

Published: September 2016



We live in exciting times with the prospect of most of us living to the age of eighty in reasonable health. Our aspiration for our communities and neighbourhoods is that they will support us to age well. But we also live in difficult economic times for local authorities, trying to make their communities more age friendly with limited budgets. We want to help address this with this publication and list of resources.

Street Design for Age Friendly Neighbourhoods:

This publication is for older activists, local authority councillors and officers interested in how their street looks or those involved in redesigning or redeveloping streets in their community.

Older people should be consulted at the earliest stage, and by methods, at times, and in locations that are convenient to them. Local access forums or groups (see Resources page) can also advise on Age-Friendly street design. Involving local older people in planning proposed changes to your local community can bring benefits in terms of age friendliness, community ownership and may also save money. We hope you find this publication useful.

Back in December 2011 the Department of Communities and Local Government published a document entitled "Lifetime Neighbourhoods" to encourage decision makers to recognise the importance of neighbourhood as a determinant of well-being in later life and its crucial role in supporting older people's independence and continued participation in our communities. The shape of our streets and neighbourhoods owe much to the history of our communities; the planners, architects and technological change that have shaped them over the centuries.

A neighbourhood that makes it easy and enjoyable to go outdoors can add significantly to a person's health and well being. As we grow older we need to look again and see if we can make these same streets better for all our ageing citizens.



Many people will move into a street in their 30s and may not move again for another 40 years. Does that make it age friendly or is there more to it? Research carried out by Edinburgh, Warwick and Salford universities (see Resources page: Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors website) found that there are three reasons older people give for going out and they are: socialising, getting physical exercise and fresh air, and contact with nature. The challenge then is how to make all those possible in the same street landscape. There a number of key elements to making an age friendly street or neighbourhood and here are some to think about.

Lighting:

It may seem unusual to start here but as we grow older our eyes lose sensitivity and a 70 year old can require three times as much light as a 20 year old for the same visual performance. Changes in light level also take longer to adapt to. We need more light to see things clearly; the path ahead, kerbs or signage. Older people may be reluctant to go out because of fear of crime and for personal safety.



Good street lighting

Good lighting may enhance the sense of safety and encourage community involvement, thereby reducing isolation. In dark areas or those with inadequate lighting, it may affect a person's confidence to navigate streets and pavements and so restrict their activity. Good lighting also helps people feel safe in their neighbourhood. New LED lights are also more energy efficient to run. If lights are being replaced in a conservation area, there are lots of modern 'old lights' to match the design of the area.

If underpasses are part of your street, try to ensure the entrances are as well-lit as the underpass to make people feel safe. This is an example of a poorly lit entrance though the underpass itself is well lit.



Poorly lit entrance to underpass



Well-lit underpass

Paths, roads and spaces to get together:



Smooth pathway

A smooth pathway makes it easier for people to walk. If people use a walking stick or frame, a smooth surface reduces the effort required to make progress and so encourage people to walk further than they might otherwise.

Large trees can be an obstacle, especially on narrow pavements or if they are forcing the pavement to be uneven.



Uneven paving

Uneven surfaces and obstacles can also include railings and posts for signs and lighting, temporary obstacles such as A-Boards and temporary signage that can cause a hazard and should be away from the line of walkers.



A confusing space full of obstacles



Fountain area

This fountain is a nice place for people to gather. However, on the far side of the fountain, the ground is more sloped so steps have been added. The lack of contrast and introduction of different levels had led to falls so posts have been introduced to alert people to the changing levels.

Different coloured or textured paving can aid navigation and help separate vehicles from pedestrians or indicate shared space and make motorists, cyclists and pedestrians more careful in how they navigate in that area. Dropped kerbs and changes in paving are the usual methods of marking a road crossing.



Posts to alert pedestrians

Whether you have clear road markings or “shared space” with pedestrians and vehicles, people need to be able to see clearly to enable safe navigation. This doesn’t mean you have to have pedestrian crossings everywhere, just clarity and respect.

Crossings:

Where formal pedestrian crossings are used, the most important factors are location, clear signals for pedestrians and timing. The location of a crossing may encourage or discourage use and pedestrians, as well as road users, need to be considered when choosing the right location.

The amount of time given to pedestrians to cross the road is particularly important for slower walkers. This includes both the very young and those adults who are less agile. The use of 'countdowns' on some crossings has helped people to assess timings and feel safer.

If a road is particularly wide and busy then a traffic island, which will enable slower pedestrians to pause, can offer a refuge rather than increased anxiety about being able to cross in the time available. Modern Puffin Crossings can utilise sensors to detect the presence of pedestrians on the crossing. As with all light-controlled crossings, there are pros and cons to this, particularly on busy roads and near schools. Consulting with users of local services will help to identify the best type and location for a pedestrian crossing.



Clear road crossing with traffic islands

Access to transport:

As mobility declines, so the proximity and accessibility of transport becomes even more vital to enable older people to maintain social and



community involvement. A simple audit of a street and its users will indicate who is and who isn't

able to use this street. Many people with limited mobility are still able to drive so parking spaces are important to them. Consider if there are enough disabled spaces in an area to cope with demand. Can people easily get to their preferred form of transport? Are there dropped kerbs at every access point which would enable those using mobility scooters or wheelchairs to go further? Is there a smooth route to access public transport?

If there are bus shelters, and they are preferable to just a finger post, then are they well designed?

Things to include are protection from the elements on three sides, seating, good colour contrast and current information about services.



A good example

Seating:

Comfortable seats, well designed and located offer everyone a resting place, a social opportunity, the chance to pause and engage with the surrounding environment. Additional considerations are the height of the seat which should be a minimum of 450 to 475 mm to enable easy sitting and standing. Other requirements particularly for older people include armrests and straight backs to enable rest and ease in rising from the seat. If possible, wooden seats are preferred because they do not hold the cold as much as metal, stone or concrete seating so are more attractive to older people.



While this seat offers a sociable resting place in the main shopping area it does not have the features that are most appreciated.



The seat above incorporates some features with older people in mind – a backrest, arms and a good height – and is appreciated by everyone

This seat below was designed in partnership

between Design Network North, Butter Innovations, and Newcastle Elders and incorporates all the features highlighted plus somewhere for a walking stick or handbag to rest or for a bicycle to be parked at the back - A design for all ages.



A seat design for all ages

© Newcastle University

Signage:



Signage can be both an aid and a hindrance. Everyone finds it easier to find their way round when streets are labelled and signs are easy to see. It is also helpful if lampposts and signs are well located but sometimes the number of posts on the pavement, with signs aimed at motorists, can make progress for pedestrians or those with more complex mobility issues, quite challenging. This sign is clear and easy to read but would have been better if it included approximate distances and where the public toilets are located.

Public Toilets:

Lack of access to toilets can limit the time a person can spend away from home. The Senate of Welsh Older People said, "Poor public toilet provision can lead to poor health, loneliness and isolation". Some common conditions and associated medications make access to toilet facilities a more urgent need. This is worth considering particularly when looking at shopping centres and high streets as well as access to Accessible Toilets and Changing Places that will encourage everyone to visit areas in the locality.

Community Toilet schemes like these below in Oldham and Bishop Stortford are one response to the shortage of publicly maintained toilets and they do encourage people into local shops and businesses who are part of the Community Toilet Scheme. The one improvement that might be made to these signs would be to include the opening hours and distance from the sign.



If local authority toilets are not available, what shops and businesses have facilities that the public can use? There may be agreements between traders and the local authority or local signs indicating that the public are welcome to use their facilities without embarrassment on either part. This can enhance the attractiveness of local shops to older shoppers and encourage local trade

Concluding comment:

Why not undertake a street audit yourself? This publication aims to give you some pointers and ideas. These will not be the only considerations you will have regarding your streets but an Age Friendly street is not only attractive and welcoming but will encourage people of all ages to be active and engaged in your community.

Resources:

Lifetime Neighbourhoods

Department of Communities and Local Government "Lifetime Neighbourhoods"

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lifetime-neighbourhoods-2>

Housing Learning and Improvement Network Guide to Age Friendly Communities in the North

<http://www.housinglin.org.uk/HousingRegions/NorthWest/?parent=1020&child=7253>

Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors

This website brings together a range of practical resources based on academic research of older people's experiences from across the United Kingdom.

www.idgo.ac.uk

Manchester City Council's Design for Access 2

http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200041/equality_and_diversity/5885/our_approach_to_equality/13

Shared Space Design

Department of Transport <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/shared-space>

Regarding 'shared space' and blind and visually impaired people, the publication, 'SIGHT LINE Designing Better Streets for People with Low Vision', addresses the debate in the visually impaired group about the value of shared space.

<http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/report/sight-line>

The Irish Centre for Universal Design has looked closely at shared space.

<http://www.universaldesign.ie/sharedspace>

BBC Radio 4 programme "Thinking Streets" – programme on street design

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b018xs8t>

Lighting

While there is little specifically about older people and lighting, The Society of Light and Lighting, part of the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers have published a free factsheet on lighting for people who are visually impaired which includes many older people.

<http://www.cibse.org/knowledge/cibse-lighting-factfile/lighting-factfile-8-lighting-for-people-who-are-vi>

Age Friendly Seating

Years Ahead, the North East Forum on Ageing has been working with Newcastle Elders, Newcastle University to design and build an Age Friendly seat for use in public areas.

<http://www.yearsahead.org.uk/reports/accessibilitytransport/Years%20Ahead%20report%20on%20older%20person%20friendly%20seating.pdf>

Age Friendly Manchester research on seating and sense of place paper by Amy Barron, 2013

http://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/6373/age-friendly_seating_and_sense_of_place

Resources:

Pedestrian Crossings

Northern Ireland government have published information on crossings for people with visual impairments

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/pedestrian-facilities-visually-impaired-signal-controlled-crossings-rsppg-e009>

Engagement with Older People

Newcastle Elders have an Age Friendly working group who have been doing audits of the City centre, local parks and district centres as part of the Council's Urban Action Plan for a number of years. Their methodology and reports are available from their website.

<http://www.elderscouncil.org.uk/older-person-friendly-city>

Local Access Forums – for information on local forums that can help see

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-access-forums-participate-in-decisions-on-public-access>

Public Toilets:

Welsh Senate for Older people have identified access to public toilets as key to loneliness and isolation.

<http://www.welshsenateofolderpeople.com/campaigns.htm>

The Daily Mail took a look at Leeds city centre.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2614585/Why-elderly-shoppers-stand-Britains-towns-Lack-public-toilets-places-sit-putting-older-people-visiting.html>

Department of Communities and Local Government published a paper in 2008, "Improving Public Access to Better Quality Toilets".

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/publicaccesstoilets>