



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

Dementia and Town Planning

How spatial planning can create better environments for people living with dementia

There are currently 850,000 people living with dementia in the UK. This is set to increase to 1 million by 2021 and to 2 million by 2051.¹ Evidence has shown that good quality housing and well-planned, enabling local environments can have a substantial impact on the quality of life of someone living with dementia, helping them to live well for longer.

The RTPI's practice advice that shows how good planning can create better environments for people living with dementia. We maintain that if you get an area right for people with dementia, you get it right for older people, for young disabled people, for families with small children, and ultimately for everyone.

What is dementia?

Dementia refers to a set of symptoms that may include memory loss and difficulties with thinking, problem solving or language. However, a person living with dementia may also experience changes in their mood or behaviour. Dementia can also exacerbate the effects of physical impairments. The sensory challenges of the disease are now becoming better understood. Dementia is an umbrella term and is caused when the brain is damaged by diseases, such as Alzheimer's or a series of strokes.

Impact of the local environment

It is vital that people with dementia stay as active as they can - physically, mentally and socially. People with dementia need meaningful activities they enjoy, which can maintain their confidence. However, a survey by Alzheimer's Society found that 35 percent of people with dementia said they only go out once a week or less and 10 percent said once a month or less. The local environment is a fundamental factor contributing to the quality of life of older people, it can either be enabling or disabling. Having access to amenities like local shops, doctors, post offices and banks within easy, safe and comfortable walking distances contributes to people with dementia being able to live independent and fulfilling lives for longer.

¹ Alzheimer's Society www.alzheimers.org.uk or www.alzscot.org

Urban design

Good urban design is essential for improving the ability of people living with dementia to live well:

Familiar environment

Functions of places and buildings are obvious, any changes are small scale and incremental;

Legible environment

A hierarchy of street types, which are short and fairly narrow. Clear signs at decision points;

Distinctive environment

A variety of landmarks, with architectural features in a variety of styles and materials. There is a variety of practical features, e.g. trees and street furniture;

Accessible environment

Land uses are mixed with shops and services within a 5-10 minute walk from housing. Entrances to places are obvious and easy to use and conform to disabled access regulations;

Comfortable environment

Open space is well defined with toilets, seating, shelter and good lighting. Background and traffic noise should be minimised through planting and fencing. Street clutter is minimal to not impede walking or distract attention;

Safe environment

Footpaths are wide, flat and non-slip, development is orientated to avoid creating dark shadows or bright glare.

Some places are leading the way in integrating the needs of people living with dementia into their plans, policies and developments.

Plymouth

Delivering a healthy city is a strategic objective of The Plymouth Plan 2011-2031. Policy 8: Addressing health inequalities and supporting healthy lifestyles,² includes an ambition to become a dementia friendly city in recognition of the fact that over 3,130 over-65s were living with dementia in 2014, a number that is predicted to increase to 4,850 by 2030. The Plymouth Plan Area Assessments and their subsequent updates will assess whether Plymouth's communities have access to the services they require, including enabling people with dementia to be able to live as normal a life as possible by ensuring that their needs are considered in all walks of life.

² www.plymouth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/PlymouthPlanPartOne.pdf

Worcestershire County Council

The Strategic Planning team and Directorate of Public Health at Worcestershire County Council and representatives from the planning teams from the three South Worcestershire Councils (Malvern Hills, Wychavon and Worcester City) adopted a Planning for Health Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)³ in 2017. This SPD provides guidance when planning for and creating healthier developments. Sections dedicated to 'age friendly environments and dementia' give specific design advice to create local areas that meet the needs of people living with dementia, setting a strong policy stance for future development.

Improving the local environment

Planners have a significant impact on the accessibility of the built environment for people living with dementia through their role in the design and maintenance of public spaces and in the decisions and policies they make for an area. Planners should involve people with dementia on advising on new developments. Taking the opportunity to 'walk the patch' - spending time with people with dementia in their local area is a powerful way of understanding the issues they face and ensuring that places are designed in an inclusive way.

Bradford

In Bradford the Face it Together group (FIT) is wholly led by people with dementia. They have provided feedback on signage and accessibility, advised on a hospital refurbishment and planning the Westfield Shopping Centre. The Dementia Engagement and Empowerment Project (DEEP)⁴ has published a guide on involving people with dementia as members of steering or advisory groups.

Kirriemuir

A conservation area regeneration scheme in Kirriemuir, Angus, Scotland sits alongside work being undertaken by the Dementia Friendly Kirriemuir Project. The Council gave planning permission for a change of use and approved the lease of derelict land in Kirriemuir to develop a dementia friendly garden with a rent of £1.00 per year. The garden is a safe, friendly, outdoor space that people living with dementia, their carers and family, as well as members of the local community can enjoy and help to maintain. The regeneration projects have reduced clutter within the public realm. The joining of these two projects provide a sympathetic approach to meeting the needs of both the historic built environment and people in the area living with dementia.

³ www.wychavon.gov.uk/documents/10586/0/Health+SPD.pdf/ab36536f-a849-d712-0260-5f0e11f0df4e

⁴ www.dementiavoices.org.uk/deep-guides/

Housing design

Good, carefully considered design is even more important inside the home, whether this is a family home, extra care housing, residential care or nursing care. Often small changes can be enough to help someone living with dementia to be more independent by providing an environment that is clearly defined, easy to navigate, and feels safe. Whilst the internal layout of buildings is usually beyond the scope of the role of planners, it is still worth being aware of the key principles of good design, which include:

- Safe environment,
- Visual clues,
- Interior design,
- Noise,
- Natural light or stronger artificial light,
- Outside space.

Limewood

Limewood, in the town of Stafford has been independently audited by the University of Stirling, and accredited with a gold award for its design. It is a specialist dementia care home with 59 bedrooms. It includes an innovative dementia hub; the High Street - a 1950s internal street scene with a pub, cinema based on the local Stafford Picture house, and a hairdressers and barbers. It was built by The Wrekin Housing Trust, in partnership with Staffordshire County Council and Galliford Try.

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For the full practice advice

www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/practice/dementia-and-town-planning/

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