

Stockton Urban Stockton Park & Waterfront

Comments re Dementia friendly

The project looks fantastic although I cannot grasp the scale easily.

Contrast:

The design shows seating and there does need to be plenty, however, seating needs to be clearly visible to a person living with dementia. Seats do not need to be bright primary colours and can still look natural and aesthetic. There needs to be a definitive contrast in the shading of the seat in relation to its base and to the floor. If using wood, then remember weathering will alter the contrast, so what looks good initially, can easily pale into insignificance and thus lose its purpose. If a person cannot define a seat, they will not recognise it as a seat. Examples of this are on the current high street and silver street. If an arm rest is used, then this too should have a contrast to the seat by shade or materials used. Some seating needs to have a backrest to aid comfort and posture.

Flower beds can be block colours or form simple patterns within each bedding area. Bright colours and primary colours are more easily recognised as a pleasing picture.

Shrubs and trees can cause some discomfort to PLWD but this is something to simply be aware of. If they are planted on green areas and they are green shrubs/trees, they may not be easily visible as they blend in. The trunk or a copper beech etc will be distinctive and create a contrast. Planting in an enclosed bed with a border may be helpful or plant shrubs with a contrasting foliage.

If you post notices or use a notice board, then a clear font such as arial, larger font size makes it easily readable. There needs to be a border and a contrast to the print i.e. black print white card. The border could be as simple as a darker notice board with notices spaced even as little as a 2.5cm apart to allow the person to differentiate between each one. This is also linked to vision and perception, and is mentioned below.

Steps and gradients should be clearly identified and will also be linked to the areas mentioned below. It may be useful to have fencing or a colour

change to mark the edge of the walkways. This could be bark chippings or shale to contrast with the walkway differentiating the start of adjoining areas. In areas of planting which are for observation only, it is important to understand that people may walk amongst these or start to garden for themselves. It would be lovely to have a DIY area for meaningful occupation and could be adopted by a voluntary organisation such as greenlinks to ensure maintenance. It could be that some planting used as a border could be in a raised bed and of a sensory nature. These will need to be robust such as lavender, roses (with no or limited thorns) even eucalyptus, as they will be touched. A border or something contrasting such as slate or bark, will reduce unwanted intervention due to it being perceived as a barrier if the contrast is strong.

Steps should be clearly identified to minimise slips trips and falls. It is important to note that the direction of edgings need to be clear, a good contrast and point in a vertical manner to minimise slips trips falls and reduce fear/anxiety fears. Horizontal strips, lighting etc will be perceived as a barrier as these people cannot differentiate depth or height thus exaggerating their movement. An example of this is in the ally near green dragon yard to Silver St.

Gradients should be gentle to support walking or pushing a wheelchair, and seating should be available along the route. It is important to note that some seating should have an arm rest to assist rise and sitting or to assist in standing sitting. This also aids people with poor posture and sitting balance

It is noted there are bus shelters, and presumably these are the high St slides. It is important to note that timetables are at least A3 and of the clear font and contrast to see. As most shelters are clear then it is important that the frames for these are of a good contrast to be easily read and recognised and prevent frustrations resulting in behaviours that challenge people around the immediate area. There is a good example of one bus stop near the globe where the stand has a seat and a larger print timetable, but the others revert to normal type.

Advertising is important to the authorities, but it is important people can recognise what bus to catch before what perfume might be good to wear!

Choice of walkway materials are difficult as PLWD have physical as well as hidden disabilities. This may be visual, mobility or brain damage which affects all the categories in this critique.

Vision:

Peripheral vision is the first part of the vision to deteriorate so people will not be aware of hazards, signs etc to the side. The positions of the lamp posts are central on what appears to be the waterfront slide, this is a positive thing as people will have them in direct line of vision.

People living with dementia need 2.5 times more light than normal so shady darkened areas will not always benefit them

The above point is also important on a seasonal note as the natural light is poorer in the winter months therefore the park may have less usage at this time or need more lighting at this time.

Thinking of the activity in the amphitheatre, there is a need for a view point that is a little quieter as some people do not like to be in amongst the noise as it may become confusing and raise agitation levels. This is a good thing to have to look out onto the river too. Viewpoints need to be wheelchair accessible and it would be helpful if benches have arms at the end as some people do need this for balance and to rise and seat themselves for a comfortable view point. Remember the need for seating is for the PLWD and their carers. Other areas such as the children's play area will be an attraction as PLWD often like to watch the children play, may have young children themselves as young people are being diagnosed in Stockton as awareness is being raised, and grandparents still do a lot of child minding.

Signage:

Signage needs to be a minimal as each destination point or life station within the park is a signpost in its own right.

A children's play area is clearly seen as what it is, a children's play area, so requires no immediate signage for people living with dementia. They generally like to watch and interact with them even visit with their own children/grandchildren. Appropriate seating is important around this area.

The café will need signage as it is not obvious, but the signage will need to be words and pictures for all to identify with it. Remember the need for contrast too. Primary colours or another clearly contrasting colour. Lights especially flashing lights may cause confusion and may invoke seizures. Mirrored signs are to be avoided as this will cause distress to some people and could start arguments as they see their reflections as intrusive and provoking, i.e. staring back at them.

Traditional signs pointing in different directions are good as they invoke memories of walks places etc. They do need to be clear with a font of a good contrast and identifiable.

If there is a need for signs, contrast, combined words and pictures and clear font is better for cognition.

Height of signs is important. Eye level and clearly placed also remember poor peripheral vision is common.

Signs need to be durable and not fade or discolour. If letters are effaced or damaged, repair/replace as soon as possible.

Perception:

Damage to the parietal lobe means perception is greatly altered. Highly patterned items may appear to the person as a swarm of insects, a pit of snakes and to them this is real. This is worth knowing for any artwork in the park.

Outlines may be seen as scary things so consider this if there are sculptures.

The wind blowing through the trees on a windy day may be perceived as people whispering or fighting so beware of planting in areas that normally are effectuated by prevailing winds. Wind chimes may have similar effects.

Earlier we spoke of darker areas or damaged areas such as a black tarmac repair being perceived as a void because a person with dementia cannot perceive the contrast as high, low or flat to the ground. This in turn may create anxiety/fear and increases slips trips and falls potentially as well as aggression.

APPENDIX 1

Cracks in pavements, litter and graffiti can all be perceived as something other than what it is, thus increasing anxieties etc as stated above, Housekeeping needs to be good to prevent this.

Availability of shade and drinking water is essential. It may be on a hot day, a person feels thirsty and hot. Their boundaries have been eroded away causing them to not remember what is right and what is wrong. This means they may drink from water features and start to remove their clothing. Shaded area and a drinking fountain may help to divert this potentially disinhibited behaviour.

Music is always a positive and the amphitheatre is a positive note but consider some regular gentle music throughout times it is not being used.

Finally, View points along the frontage of the river even as far as the slipway will allow full accessibility to this beautiful vista and allow people with limited mobility and the need to stay out of a crowd to still feel included.

These points are not exhaustive but a good broad view of this wonderful project.