

"The Birches" Alzheimer Day Centre, Dundalk.

Submission to

Louth County Council

Development Plan 2021 -2027

December 2020

Introduction

“The Birches” Alzheimer Day Centre is part of the Alzheimer Society of Ireland and welcomes this opportunity to make a contribution to the Louth County Development Plan consultation process that hopefully will support not only people living with Alzheimer / Dementia but all people future quality of life and access to services and the built environment across County Louth.

This year “The Birches” celebrated twenty years of providing a much needed, valued & cherished service to the people of the area.

“The Birches” provides direct and indirect services to approximately 75 people weekly across the district of Dundalk & North Louth with many more on our waiting list. In addition, it liaises and advocates on behalf of the person and their carers with all medical professions and stakeholders.

“The Birches” service is led by an excellent and one of the most experienced Nurse’s in the country who is supported by a wonderful team of Health Care Assistants

Their work is actively supported by the North Louth Branch ASI who’s members work in a totally voluntary capacity.

Driven by Health & Safety and now aided by COVID 19 requirements, we have an urgent and specific issues that we will be looking for permission and support for in 2021 is an exit from “The Birches” onto Priorland Road.

Background

The word Dementia is used to describe a set of symptoms which can vary a great deal and includes memory loss, confusion, mood and behaviour changes. Dementia can be caused by a number of diseases, with Alzheimer’s disease the most common.

Most people who have dementia live at home and are cared for by a family member. The most recent evidence suggests there are upwards 50,000 family carers in Ireland looking after someone with Dementia (Cahill et al 2012). The total cost of Dementia is estimated at €1.6 billion annually in Ireland.

The total population of County Louth is 128,884 (CSO, 2016) of this, 13,477 people are aged over 65, it is estimated that there are 1,198 people with Dementia / Alzheimer in the county, (Pierce, Cahill, O'Shea, 2014), representing 9% of the over 65 population.

There are an estimated 4,948 family carers in County Louth (1,912 males and 3,036 females), (CSO 2016) providing regular unpaid personal help for someone with a long-term illness.

Time spent caring for someone with dementia is likely to be much higher than this. A survey by the Alzheimer Society of Ireland found that 69% of Alzheimer/Dementia carer provides 14 or more hours care per day (Trepel, 2011).

Government policy is to support people to age at home. The National Positive Ageing Strategy outlines a commitment to “enable people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible” health policies such as Future Health; A Strategic Framework for Reform of the Health Service 2012- 2015.

Also, the National Dementia Strategy (2014) sets out the Government’s renewed commitment to provide person-centred, flexible, community-based supports to enable people to remain at home.

Context

Neighbourhoods for Life Designing dementia-friendly outdoor environments

The emphasis of this submission is the **Sustainable Environments and** I can no better than bring to your attention an outline of the excellent work of the Oxford Institute for Sustainable Environments Research Unit which I list below:

The Wellbeing in Sustainable Environments Research Unit of the Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development has recently concluded a three-year research project, funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's EQUAL programme, examining how the outside environment could be made **dementia-friendly**.

This unprecedented research investigated the perceptions, experiences and use of the outdoor environment by older people with dementia and identified design factors that influence their ability to successfully use and negotiate their local neighbourhoods. The findings have enabled the researchers to provide some preliminary guidance for designers, at all scales from urban design to street furniture, on the criteria to consider in developing dementia-friendly urban areas.

Summary of key findings • Older people with dementia, particularly in the mild to moderate stages, continue to go out alone, many daily. • Older people with dementia tend to limit their outside activities to relatively undemanding situations, such as going to the corner shop, posting a letter or going for a walk.

Older people with dementia tend to use cars or public transport only when accompanied by others so that independent outside activity is restricted to the immediate neighbourhood within walking distance of home.

Although the interaction of older people with dementia with the outdoor environment is limited, it is clear that it provides some sense of independence and self-respect at a time when they are losing control over their own abilities and lives.

Older people with dementia generally enjoy going out but anxiety, disorientation or confusion can occur in complex, crowded or heavily trafficked places or when startled by sudden loud noises.

Older people with dementia tend to be less aware of physical and social dangers in the outdoor environment and of the possibility of losing the way than older people without dementia.

Older people with dementia cannot always interpret the cues that signal the use of buildings, the location of entrances or the behaviour that is expected in different places. • Older people with dementia continue to plan and visualise proposed routes and tend to use **landmarks** and other visual cues rather than maps and written directions as wayfinding techniques.

Older people with dementia tend to prefer: ✓ mixed-use, compact local neighbourhoods ✓ short, gently winding streets with wide pavements and good visual access ✓ varied urban form and architectural features ✓ quiet, pedestrianised streets and welcoming open spaces ✓ places, spaces and buildings whose functions and entrances are obvious ✓ simple, explicit signs with large, dark, unambiguous graphics on a light background

Historic, civic or distinctive landmarks and practical or aesthetic environmental features ✓ smooth, plain, non-slip, non-reflective paving ✓ easy to use street furniture in styles familiar to older people. • Dementia-friendly neighbourhoods are places that are familiar, legible, distinctive, accessible, comfortable and safe.

Citation

[Mitchell, L.](#) and [Burton, E.](#) (2006), "Neighbourhoods for life: Designing dementia-friendly outdoor environments", [Quality in Ageing and Older Adults](#), Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 26-33.

The number of older people in Ireland is rising year on year, particularly in the age group of 85 years and above. As the likelihood of developing dementia increases with age, reaching a one in five chance over the age of 80, the number of people with dementia in Ireland is also growing.

Our understanding is “The Disability Act 2005” recognises disability as including cognitive and sensory as well as physical impairments and expected all barriers restricting the access and use of services by disabled people to be removed.

In Conclusion

“The Birches” recognises we are very fortunate in County Louth to have an excellent Age Friendly Officer and a number of County Councillors who we continually interact with, however, it is our view that we must at all times be alert and advocate for people who may and can be marginalised.

Please contact “The Birches” on 042-9351388 if you require any further information or clarification.

Thank you for taking the time to read.

Gerry Murphy