Welcome to this introductory video which introduces the ‘Working towards creating dementia friendly parks, outside spaces and nature reserves’ project and resources. Throughout the video the use of the word ‘parks’ means all outside spaces including nature reserves.

The project is being funded by the Heritage Fund, part of the National Lottery. It’s also being supported by the University and our collaborators.

Our collaborators came together very early in the project. Sadly none had the money to fund the resource development. However they all helped us put the application together to the Heritage Fund and have remained members of our Project Working Group. Without them we would not have been able to develop these resources.

We thought it might be helpful to give you a little background to dementia. Not all dementias are the same. There may be over 200 types, with Alzheimer’s Disease and Vascular dementia being the most common. The risk of dementia increases with age. The general figure quoted is that one in three people over the age of 65 will develop dementia but there are also younger people who have dementia. It’s important to recognise that everybody experiences dementia differently.

Dementia can have a major impact on memory and also other senses and abilities. Not everyone living with dementia will necessarily have all these difficulties. Many of these changes impact on how people living with dementia relate to their environment. Sensory challenges are common in people living with dementia who may already have sight and hearing loss due to their age. They may also experience mobility issues which can be associated with their dementia. This does not mean however that they cannot enjoy being outside, feeling the sun, wind and rain, crunching leaves in the autumn, touching trees and plants and smelling flowers.

These are some of the challenges that people living with dementia may experience. Many of these are particularly important when thinking about how to make parks more dementia friendly.

Since 2009 there’s been a great deal of research into the impact the physical environment can have on people living with dementia. Firstly in care homes, then across health and social care and outdoor spaces such as gardens and urban design. The outcomes we are looking for is to ease decision making, reduce agitation and distress, encourage independence and social interaction, promote safety, and enable the continuation of activities of daily living.

Some of these figures are quite old, but they’re the best that we have at the moment. There are about a million people living with dementia in the UK. There are an estimated 700,000 unpaid carers looking after them. Dementia is a progressive condition, a bit like a book. It does have a beginning, middle and end and perhaps too often we focus on the

advanced stages. For example people living with Alzheimer's Disease can remain very active for many years. The important thing to recognise, particularly in the context of parks, is that 70-80% of people living with dementia live at home.

There's several reasons why we started this project. There was a report from Natural England in 2016 which indicated that people living with dementia suffered multiple disadvantage when accessing parks. For example signage was poor, toilets, cafes and places to sit were not always available and there were not always people available who had an understanding of dementia. Early on we asked parks staff if they could identify areas that could be improved to make them more dementia friendly. As you can see many respondents could not. 69% of those staff felt that an assessment tool would be helpful.

We've undertakan an extensive review of published literature, policy and practice and did not find any information to suggest that there were any similar freely available resources of the scope or kind that we were intending to develop. These are an assessment tool, guide and this video to support parks to work towards becoming more dementia friendly. Although the focus has been on dementia, any improvements are also likely to improve the park for all those who are neurodiverse. The resources have been tested in parks of different sizes, locations and with a range of facilities.

There are some key elements that are important in dementia friendly design. One of the most important is to recognise that people living with dementia may not be able to distinguish objects if they're the same colour as their background.

For example, this grab rail would probably not be seen, grey on grey. Nor would white food on a white plate. And it's difficult to see these white seats against the white of the windows, or these benches which are the same colour as their surroundings.

Colour and contrast from surrounding surfaces are needed for some people living with dementia, for instance to see the toilet seat or rails. Indeed the only thing that may be distinguishable in the picture on the left would be the floor cleaning sign. You can see what a difference colour can make if the rails and seat are in a contrasting colour. It's recommended that a difference in light reflectance value of at least 30%, it's called LRV, is needed to ensure different objects and surfaces can be seen. LRV measures the % of visible light a painted surface reflects. Zero is absolute black while pure white is 100%. The bench on the right has little contrast with its surroundings. However, you do have to be careful with highly contrasting surfaces. For instance this black mat might look a hole to step over.

We all rely on signage when we are in an unfamiliar environment but signs must be large enough to be seen, the writing must have good contrast with the background and be on both sides of the sign, and there should not be too much information. Symbols are not universal and without another clue may be misinterpreted. A friend's mother who was

living with dementia interpreted the top sign on the right hand side for her to use that toilet as she was wearing trousers. The symbols at the bottom left could be very difficult to interpret. Somebody might think they needed to be in a wheelchair, or be very, very confused by the symbol on the right. It's probably better to use text as well as a symbol to help avoid this type of confusion.

The resources we've developed are practical and easy to use by everyone. They're based on research evidence and best practice, and the assessment tool is not a pass/fail. It can be repeated over time to demonstrate improvement, act as an educational tool, and provide evidence for investment. It is generic, and as said earlier the use of the work 'park' means any park, outside space or nature reserve. It's understood that not every park will have all the characteristics, facilities or staff mentioned, but it was felt important to create a single tool to cover all sites. The term accessible route has been used rather than dementia friendly to ensure there's no discrimination against those who are affected by dementia.

The tool is structured in three sections. Before a visit, the outside environment, and buildings that may be on the site. Each section has a rationale to explain why the particular issues are important to people living with dementia, and a series of questions. The questions in section A1 just require a yes/no answer, and the answers to questions in section B and C require a rating. There is more information on the rating scale in the guide.

This is the rationale for section A. It's the section that people living with dementia and those that care for them who have been involved in the project emphasised as being the most important to them.

These are some of the questions in section A. What's important is not only that the information is available but that it's easy to find. You can see how important this information is from the general access survey in 2024. It's important for a prospective visitor to know if staff have undertaken dementia awareness training. Depending on operational policies they might wear a lanyard or badge to indicate that they have done so.

There are two types of scoring in the assessment tool. Section A1 just requires a yes/no or non applicable answer. Sections B and C require you to rate each answer from 1 to 5, where 1 means barely met and 5 means fully met. This can be somewhat subjective, and that's why it's advisable to do the assessment with a colleague, volunteer or person affected by dementia. There's more information and a worked example in the guide.

These are questions in section B1. One of the major difficulties people have told us about is how to pay for car parking! It's not so much the payment but rather how you need to pay, so really clear information is needed. If practical there do need to be both blue badge spaces and some larger spaces for those with mobility aids.

As discussed, signage is really important and a key aid to wayfinding. But there can be too much of it or it can only be on one side of a sign, although the sign can actually be approached from different directions. But it has to have a purpose and be clear, not too much, just what is needed. Sandwich boards are often used as movable signage but they must not cause a trip hazard.

Orientation is more about knowing where you are and landmarks like a historical building, information boards or a bridge can act as good aids to orientation. These chairs on the left however, not so sure about these. Are they artworks or are they seats? But they could provide a good landmark as you were walking round the park.

We have focused on accessible walking routes as not all parks will be able to make all their paths more dementia friendly. Kissing gates and stiles can block routes and tree roots may make paths inaccessible to those in wheelchairs, particularly the smaller foldable ones. The three photos on the right show good wide accessible pathways but one is blocked at the end by a locked gate, which could cause anxiety, and some further signage on all these pathways would help if people get lost.

For those that are able, an outdoor gym or other sporting facilities will be welcomed. Activity can also be looking at a lake in the sunshine, though not in such low chairs, watching birds or listening to music. Or if parks are able, creating a quiet hour in an area of the park will be really valued.

Outdoor seating can be problematic for people living with dementia and older people more generally, especially if they're using mobility aids. Bench seating which does not have any back rests or arms can be particularly difficult to sit down on or to get up from. Metal furniture and fittings such as handrails can get very hot in summer or cold in winter and should not be used. Good wooden benches with arms and back rests and space beside them for mobility aids are ideal. Ideally there should be some shelter from sun and rain provided where possible.

Grating can be impossible to walk on if you need to use a walking stick as the end of the stick goes straight through and the use of grating should be avoided. Any safety notices should be really clear and eye catching. The sign on the rope reads no access but it is difficult to read. Good clear identification of a change in level is really helpful. Overflowing bins can cause agitation and distress for people living with dementia. And good signage to the fire assembly point and defibrillator will reassure everybody.

As discussed, good signage is really important and it can help people find a building. It's impossible to see what the building on the top left is. Opening hours should be clearly displayed. And an entrance both with steps and a ramp is ideal. Strongly contrasting floor mats should be avoided. Hearing loops should be installed in all public buildings. And providing some seating near the entrance to buildings will enable people to rest if needed.

Toilets are very important to us all and especially important to older people and those living with dementia who may get very anxious if they cannot find one in a hurry. We've emphasised the need for colour and contrast already. Accessing the facilities should be step free and level. The toilets on the left are set above the ground with a good walkway. However, the surface is difficult for people using walking sticks as they will get caught in the grating and there are no rails at the top for people to use to access the doors. Some people living with dementia will have a Radar key and others may need the facilities offered by a Changing Places toilet with more room for wheelchairs, a hoist and other facilities. There is particular signage for Changing Places toilets. As discussed earlier, toilet signage should ideally offer both symbols and text.

Indoor and outdoor cafes can offer a place to sit and enjoy refreshments with family and friends. They can however be noisy with tray trolleys, crockery and cutlery, and people talking. If it's possible to leave a quiet corner in an indoor cafe it would be much appreciated. A range of furniture should be offered both inside and out, ideally not metal as previously discussed. A range of traditional crockery and homelike tables and chairs might be appreciated.

At the end of the assessment tool is a summary sheet for your scores. This can be particularly useful for organisations who may wish to assess all their parks or several different areas of the same park. An example from the use of the tool across different hospital wards show how easy it can be to compare scores and to prioritise areas for improvement.

We have also developed a guide which gives some further details of the project, dementia and neurodiversity, the assessment tool and other factors including staff awareness of dementia.

The programme evaluation is ongoing and the six individual case studies will measure the progress of their project over a year. Once available, all evaluation reports will be posted on the project website.

Thank you for watching this video. We hope it has been helpful and has encouraged you to think about working towards becoming more dementia friendly. To find out more about the project or to download the resources you can either use the website or the QR code. And please remember that all these resources are available free. Thank you.