

## Project Officer Blog

### Lessons Learnt – Power of People

As Project Officer for the HLF South Cliff Gardens renovation project here in Scarborough I have learnt a lot over the development of the project. If I was to focus on the most important message to share it would be the following:

***“To achieve great place-making I believe it is absolutely essential to put community at the heart of project governance.”***

By this I don't mean have lots of meetings and inviting the community along to 'inform them' of what you are going to do, what I mean is ensuring members of the community have a say on every decision made throughout the project and give them the power to contribute, shape and build the places where they live. Place-making is a hugely powerful tool to use to create positive social change because it inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces and put them right at the heart of their community, bringing people together and creating stronger community cohesion.

When it comes to designing public gardens and green spaces there is so much more to it than just plants, trees, heritage, wildlife, drainage and shelters. Good quality design of public green spaces can construct creative new patterns of use, and shape the cultural and social identity of a garden, allowing it to be future flexible and grow to support not just existing communities but evolving ones in 50 or 100 years' time. The people of North Yorkshire and its visitors have an intimate knowledge of, and connection to their local green spaces. The council's goal for this project was to bring the community together and show them how powerful their collective vision could be and allow them to shape the South Cliff Gardens that they want.

It was 'Dementia Action Week' this month so I thought it would be a good opportunity to put our project's Dementia Experts into the spotlight. Creating communities that are dementia friendly is everyone's job, whether you are a gardener, shop keeper, hotel owner, local authority or local school and the benefits of creating dementia friendly communities positively affects everyone. During the last couple of years local Scarborough volunteers living well with dementia have been shaping the design for the South Cliff Gardens so that it is as dementia friendly as possible.

The volunteers started by carrying out a site audit to look at what elements of the garden worked for people living with dementia and what elements did not and I must admit it was shocking how many barriers were identified that I just would not have noticed or thought about. Recommendations were made on how we could improve the design and I thought it would be really valuable to share this information with you in case you have the opportunity to use it to shape your local community.

## Below are the recommendations from Scarborough's Dementia Experts:

1. **Ensure that all people working in parks and gardens have undertaken Dementia Friends training** – For our dementia experts the most important thing is awareness. Dementia can happen to you, your family or your friends. It's important you understand people living with dementia and you know how to help them 'live well' with dementia.
2. **Offer meaningful activities and events** - It's all very well designing beautiful gardens but it's important to actively engage with people and encourage them to contribute meaningfully to their community and outdoor spaces.
3. **Install carefully designed seating** – This should include areas for quiet contemplation and self-reflection, areas for families to rest together and areas that offer an opportunity for informal interaction between people. Make sure your seating is dementia friendly including arms on seats, contrasting colours and a warm material that is comfortable to sit on.
4. **Routes that do not lead to dead ends** – Make sure there's a sense of journey and that all footpaths do not lead to dead ends as people living with dementia can get trapped as some people can forget to turn around. Make sure you disguise service entrances and paths have smooth, level surfaces, with clearly defined edges.
5. **Sensory planting** – Design with the senses using bright colours, textures and architectural form. Stay away from poisonous plants, thorns and colours that blend into each other.
6. **Clearly identifiable spaces** – It's really hard for some people living with dementia to know what a space has to offer. It's not always clear from the outside what you can do or take part in once you enter a space so when designing, make sure you include information at the entrance outlining what's on offer and what's worth seeing. Maps and plans are great for this.
7. **Clear wayfinding** – When entering a green space it's important to have regular clues as to where to go to the main attractions and facilities.
8. **Label the exit!** – This is the most important thing I have learnt about designing public open spaces from people living with dementia. I would have not thought of it without their input. It's often easy to find your way into a space but really hard to find your way out; a simple 'exit this way' sign goes a very long way!
9. **Welcoming spaces** – Make sure you create a safe environment that welcomes in visitors, is clean, tidy, light and bright and free from litter and debris. A well looked after space informally tells the visitor it is a safe place to be.
10. **Choice** – there's mixed research on choice but we like to add in choices. It's important to find a clever way to do this so that people who are further on in their dementia journey can remain safe whilst offering those who have just been diagnosed an opportunity to make their own choices. A good example of this is to have a main accessible path through a green space that's clearly labelled and defined then offer alternative paths in a different material that subtly joins the main path.
11. **Have fun with it!** Fun is so important! Make sure open spaces have an element of fun and humour; you can't take life too seriously and it's important to have a laugh along the way.



## DEEP Group and Making Space



If you would like any further information about dementia please get in touch below:

### Dementia Action Alliance:

Membership of the alliance is open to any group, organisation or business in Scarborough. Join at: [http://www.dementiaaction.org.uk/join the alliance](http://www.dementiaaction.org.uk/join-the-alliance)

For more information please contact our **DAA Chair, Tim Kirkup**, at [timkirkup@hotmail.com](mailto:timkirkup@hotmail.com) or call 07980 290266

For information about the local **DEEP** group get in touch at: <https://www.dementiavoices.org.uk/group/deep-vibes-scarborough/>