

The Design of Streets with Older People in Mind

This I'DGO design guidance relates to public seating in streets and neighbourhoods. It is part of The Design of Streets with Older People in Mind; a toolkit for those who plan, design and maintain the public realm. It can be used as an aid to assessing the 'walkability' of local neighbourhoods, particularly with regards to the provision of comfort facilities to break up the pedestrian journey. Based on the views of over 200 older people, street audits and key sources of existing UK guidance, it includes advice on how much seating is sufficient, the effective positioning of seating on the footway and the most suitable styles and materials for public seating.

Seating Design Guide 001

I'DGO Design Guides are based on evidence from the Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors (I'DGO) research project. They have been cited by the World Health Organization as being of global importance in planning, designing and maintaining Age-Friendly Cities and by the UK Department for Transport. The research was undertaken by the SURFACE Inclusive Design Research Centre at the University of Salford. Details of context and methodology are provided within, with recommendations on the reverse.



Image © John McGonagle. With thanks to Joan Turner.

Being outdoors enhances the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of older people.
I'd go outdoors if I could: wouldn't you?

There are three aspects to public seating that affect older pedestrians: the provision of seating; the positioning of seating; and the design of the seat itself. While much existing guidance relates to seating in public 'destinations' – shopping centres, town squares and transport interchanges, for example – we have identified where recommendations have been made for the routes to and from such places, most recently as part of a drive towards more pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods in which cars and people 'share' the street...

Image courtesy of Glasgow Greenspace

Provision

In *Designing for Accessibility* (Centre for Accessible Environments, 2004), it is recommended that "seats should be provided at intervals along long routes or where waiting is likely". In *Inclusive Mobility* (DfT, 2005), the UK Department for Transport suggests that "in commonly used pedestrian areas ... seats should be provided at intervals of no more than 50 metres". In *Manual for Streets* (DfT, 2007), the Department recommends that "seating on key pedestrian routes should be considered every 100m to provide rest points and to encourage street activity". In *Local Transport Note 1/11 on Shared Space*, it calls for "generous amounts of seating" to encourage "increased pedestrian dwell times" (DfT, 2011).

Design

Across the extensive range of guidance available on styles of public seating, there is a general consensus about the necessity of providing a back rest and of the preference for arm rests. With regards to the

latter, *Inclusive Mobility* (DfT, 2005) advises that they should be positioned about 200mm above seat level and consistent in distribution, stating that "seats placed in a row either should all have armrests or no armrests; a mixture within a single row can cause difficulties for visually impaired people". With regards to dimensions, the height of the seat should be about 450 to 475mm from the floor (if a single height solution is needed)

and around a minimum of 500mm wide. It is deemed important that seats be constructed from a material which does not retain heat or cold and that they colour contrast with the background environment.



Is it causing an obstruction?

Is it on a suitable paving surface?

Is it where people would want to sit?



Positioning

In *Accesscode: a Code of Practice on Access and Mobility* (Merseytravel et al), it is recommended that street furniture is located in such a way as to preserve a “2000mm wide footway free of obstacles along the main pedestrian route”.

Working towards the same unobstructed width (or 1500mm, as best practice minimum), the UK Department for Transport suggests that seating should be positioned “adjacent to, but not obstructing, the pedestrian route” (*Inclusive Mobility*, DfT, 2005), respecting “pedestrian desire lines” and in locations with “good lighting and natural surveillance” (*Manual for Streets*, DfT, 2007).

The *Public Space Design Guide* (2006) by the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames advises that those positioning seats should “avoid locations likely to be used for the consumption of alcohol ... (or) ... near sources of pollution”. It also asks that people consider views – “is there an interesting/attractive outlook”? – prioritise “sunny positions” and provide “a space near a seat where wheelchairs can be positioned”.

Where to find out more

The guidance referred to in this publication, detailed below, has been brought to our attention over the course of various research projects, as well as via a desk top exercise undertaken in June 2012. Our aim in referencing it is to provide a general overview of the practical guidance available in the UK and not to examine, critique or compare all relevant publications.

Accesscode: a Code of Practice on Access and Mobility.

A joint project between Merseytravel and the five Merseyside Metropolitan Councils of Knowsley, Liverpool, St. Helens, Sefton, Wirral and Chester City Council.

www.accesscode.info

BS 8300:2009. Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people - Code of Practice.

British Standards Institute (2009).

www.bsigroup.com

Inclusive Mobility. A Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure. Department for Transport (2005) ***Manual for Streets.***

Department for Transport /Thomas Telford Publishing (2007).

Local Transport Note 1/11 – Shared space.

Department for Transport /TSO (The Stationery Office)(2011).

www.dft.gov.uk

Manual for Streets 2 - Wider Application of the Principles.

Department for Transport and Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation (2010)

www.dft.gov.uk; www.ciht.org.uk

Designing for Accessibility.

Andrew Lacey. Centre for Accessible Environments and RIBA Publishing (2004)

www.cae.org.uk; www.ribabookshops.com

Public Space Design Guide.

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (2006)

www.richmond.gov.uk

What seating is currently provided on Britain's streets?

There is very little seating on residential streets in neighbourhoods throughout the UK. Of the 200 streets we audited (see Methodology 1, right), 84% had no seating at all and only 4% had more than a single seat. Where seats were provided (16% of streets), they were typically in the form of a timber or metal bench, with back



and arm rests, and were in reasonable condition. Walking up to 300m from participants' homes, we found single (one-off seating) in 40% of neighbourhoods but

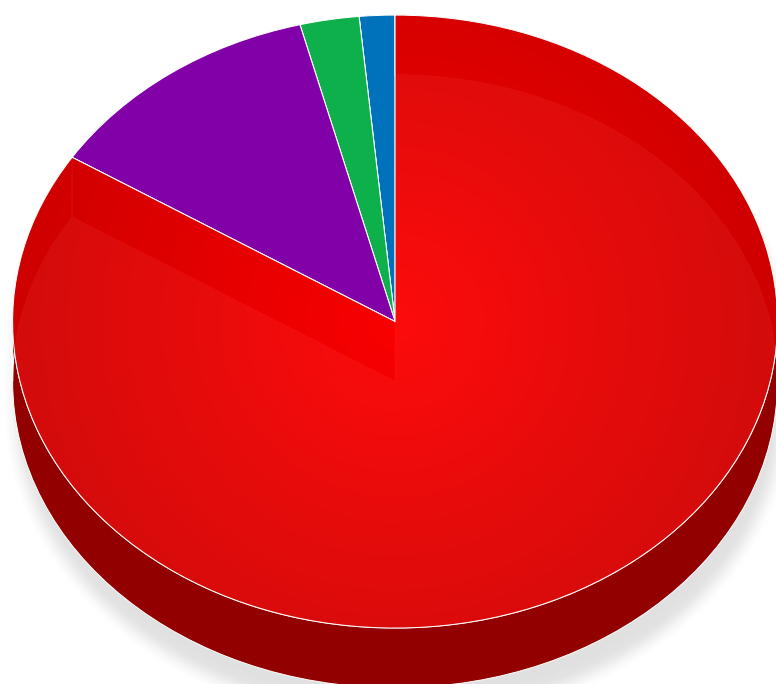
regular seating (every 100m, for example) in only 8% of neighbourhoods. There was seating in 25% of 'destinations', such as parks, church grounds, shopping precincts and outdoor markets.

Methodology 1

The findings on this page are taken from a physical audit of the local neighbourhoods of 200 older people in a variety of locations throughout the UK.

The audits were conducted within a 300m radius of each person's home and only included the places they could reasonably get to on foot. Using an externally-validated, 12-part toolkit, we assessed the provision, design and condition of streets during 'off-peak' hours. We then spoke to the same 200 participants, all aged 65 or over, for the qualitative element of our research and further information on our mixed-methods approach can be found on www.idgo.ac.uk

Provision of seating on participants' streets



- Percentage of 200 UK residential streets that had no seating whatsoever (84%)
- Percentage of 200 UK residential streets that had a single seat (12%)
- Percentage of 200 UK residential streets with seats placed less than 50 metres apart (2.5%)
- Percentage of 200 UK residential streets with seats placed 50 - 200 metres apart (1.5%)



What older people told us they prefer and why

When we interviewed 200 older people (see Methodology 2, right), they told us that there was a lack of purpose-built seating placed at regular intervals in their neighbourhood and therefore a limited number of rest points between their home and local amenities. This had an influence on the distance people were prepared to walk, either for transport (getting from a to b) or leisure (visiting neighbourhood green space, for example). Most people adopted an “anything is welcome” attitude, appropriating low walls, bus shelter seating and even concrete litter bins to perch on. Others were very clear that feeling both supported and safe were their priorities; so they did not want to sit back-to-back with anyone, for example (as is encouraged by some contemporary street furniture), or could, for reasons of mobility, only use seats with back and arm rests.

Methodology 2

The findings on this page are taken from a survey of 200 older people selected on the basis of geographical settlement, housing ownership, deprivation and living arrangement. We surveyed them to assess their preferences for how streets are designed at detailed level using a structured questionnaire filled in by interview and photo elicitation. Most participants had lived in their neighbourhood for at least five years and were satisfied with it as a place to live. 51% had mobility, vision and hearing difficulties, to the extent that their daily activities were limited, 35% per cent used some form of mobility aid and 20% had stumbled or fallen outside within six months of the date of interview.

In other I'DGO studies, conducted by OPENspace – the research centre for inclusive access to outdoor environments,

- *99% of the 572 older people surveyed said that plentiful seating in a local park was important to them.*
- *95% said that they would like to have some seats en route to their local open space.*

The study also found that the presence of seats, toilets, cafés and shelters in neighbourhood open space were significant predictors of the time participants spent outdoors.

Respondents who reported mobility difficulties placed greater importance on the provision of seats, both at the open space and en route, than those who had no problems getting around day to day.





DSOPM001

Seating

Recommendations

A lack of purpose-built seating placed at regular intervals in neighbourhood streets limits older pedestrians who, primarily for health reasons, need to stop frequently to rest when walking between their home and local amenities. To enable movement away from an “anything is welcome, sometimes” attitude, and incentivise going outdoors, it is recommended that:

- Some form of seating should be provided at 100m intervals on streets; less than 100m if the neighbourhood is hilly.
- Seating should be set back from the footway, so as not to cause an obstruction or impede the optimum clear footway width of 2000mm.
- Seating should be positioned where people would want to sit, most commonly a well-lit place, with good sightlines, away from sources of noise and air pollution.
- There should be space for a wheelchair user to pull up alongside a seated companion and end parking, on a firm surface, for a wheelchair or mobility scooter.
- The seating should be warm to sit on, comfortable and easily maintained.
- Where possible, it should have arm and back rests and be at a comfortable height for people who have difficulty bending their knees.
- Seating should also be provided at ‘destinations’, such as the local shops, preferably in multiples, so as to encourage social contact.



About this guidance:

The Design of Streets with Older People in Mind was originally published electronically in 2007. This version of **DSOPM001: Seating** dates from September 2012 and is available in both hard copy and pdf format. All queries should be addressed to the author, Rita Newton (r.newton@salford.ac.uk), who retains the copyright.

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