



Dementia Friendly Village Halls

A Guide and Checklist



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Guidance

Introduction

Village Halls, as vital community hubs, play an important role in supporting their community and in growing the communal life of villages. Halls are used for a very broad range of community activities designed to suit all ages, for example hosting clubs and societies, and providing accommodation for local events, preschool activities, rural post offices, and health services.

Following work to combat isolation for older people, Worcester Community Foundation, with funding from the Glencora Fund, and support from Community First in Herefordshire and Worcestershire, Malvern Dementia Action Alliance and the University of Worcester have developed this Guide and Checklist for Village Halls. Local village halls have kindly participated in this pilot project to develop and test the Guide and Checklist in practice. It does not supersede building, health and safety and any other relevant legislation or guidance.

This Guide and Checklist for Village Halls focuses on the needs of people living with dementia but will also be of relevance to village hall users with other disabilities. It is hoped that the approach and the resources developed during the pilot will be used to kick-start action across Worcestershire and Herefordshire and nationally through Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) to support the inclusion of people living with dementia and their families to fully share in the benefits that village halls can offer to their local communities. Although the pilot project was focused on village halls it is anticipated that the guide and checklist will be of use in other community buildings or facilities.

Most village halls are run and managed by a committee. However village halls are frequently hired by individuals or groups for events and activities through the committee or its representative. This Guide applies to all events and activities in the village hall not only just those being run by the committee. The Guide should therefore be drawn to the attention of all individuals or organisations when they book the hall so that they can contribute to making the village hall more dementia friendly.



Dementia

Although the majority of people living with dementia are older people, dementia is not a normal part of ageing. There are increasing numbers of younger people in their 40s and 50s being diagnosed with dementia, and people with intellectual disabilities are at an increased risk of developing dementia.

The word 'dementia' describes a set of symptoms caused by diseases of the brain which result in changes that can limit a person's ability to function independently. Dementia is caused by a variety of diseases and injuries that primarily or secondarily affect the brain, such as Alzheimer's disease or stroke. However, different types of dementia affect the brain at different rates and in different ways, but other things like someone's personal circumstances, the people around them and the environment in which they live, will affect their experience of dementia.

Dementia progresses in a way that is unique to each individual. Memory loss is a common symptom of dementia but people living with dementia can also experience difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language, mobility and fine motor skills, visual and spatial awareness, orientation and in recognising familiar objects. These changes are often small to start with, but for someone with dementia they become severe enough to affect daily life. A person with dementia may also experience changes in their mood or behaviour.

Why creating dementia friendly Village Halls is important

The number of people living with dementia is increasing and in Worcestershire the proportion of people living with dementia is higher than in other areas of the country.

Although everybody experiences dementia differently, symptoms associated with dementia can have a significant impact on an individual's confidence and ability to continue to lead an independent and full life. However, with the support of carers, families, friends and the local community it is possible to live well with dementia. Village halls can play a key role in this by enabling people living with dementia to continue to enjoy a varied range of activities and to remain valued members of their community.

It is estimated that two thirds of people living with dementia live in their own homes and of these one third live alone. Social isolation can therefore be experienced by people living with dementia. However, they have much to contribute and can, with support and understanding, continue to play an active role in their communities.

This guide focuses on making village halls dementia friendly by addressing two areas that are known to be important to people living with dementia:

Creating a better understanding of the disease

The Alzheimer's Society Dementia Friends initiative, launched in March 2013, aims to change people's perception of dementia by enabling them to learn more about the disease and the small ways in which anybody can help and support people living with dementia. It has been extraordinarily successful across the country and has already been taken up by many communities, helping them to involve people living with dementia in a range of activities. Some of the key messages from Dementia Friends that are particularly important for those responsible for planning and managing activities have been included in this guide. For those village halls that have not already accessed these free Dementia Friends training sessions, information can be found at www.dementiafriends.org.uk

Creating a supportive physical environment

Many people living with dementia can find the physical environment challenging, causing agitation, disorientation and distress. Older people generally have poorer eyesight and hearing, and dementia may cause additional visual and perceptual impairments. However, there is good evidence that making environments more dementia friendly can enable people to live as active a life as possible, encouraging independence and social engagement. This guide includes a checklist which focuses on aspects of the physical environment known to be important to people living with dementia which will also be of help to older people and those with intellectual or physical disabilities who use village halls.



Issues to consider when planning an event or activity

It is often difficult to know if a person with cognitive problems or living with dementia is likely to be attending a particular event as many people may not have been diagnosed. For events such as Rural Cinema or fetes which are open to the community, it is even more difficult to estimate who will be in the audience. When planning events it is therefore important to consider a variety of issues that can enable members of the community who are elderly, are living with dementia, have learning difficulties or who are socially isolated, to fully engage in village hall life.

Recognising the important role of carers

The majority of people living with dementia have a carer to enable them to live as active and engaged life as possible. Carers are usually family members or partners but they can also be a friend or a paid carer. Recent figures indicate that about half the number of carers live with the person they are supporting meaning that they have an in-depth knowledge of any day to day difficulties that the person living with dementia is experiencing including any particular triggers that can cause anxiety. Carers can therefore be an invaluable source of information about an individual's likes and dislikes and their input is critical to shaping the increased involvement of people living with dementia in community activities.

During an event it is possible that the carer may recognise that the person living with dementia is becoming unsettled and requires a period of quiet. They may therefore need to find a space inside or outside the hall where they can rest for a few moments before re-joining the event or activity. The provision of a quiet area can be helpful in these circumstances.

It is important to also recognise that the village hall community can provide support to carers as well as the person living with dementia. Caring can be physically and mentally exhausting but the activities and events held in the village hall can provide a welcome break and opportunity for carers, together with those they care for, to do something together while engaging with friends and neighbours.





Dementia Friendly Design

People living with dementia may need to be encouraged to maintain their dignity, self-esteem independence and life skills by continuing to participate and enjoy a range of social activities. The purpose of dementia friendly design is to enable them to continue to live as active a life as possible by encouraging independence and social interaction, easing decision making and promoting safety.

There is now good evidence of the importance of dementia friendly design in supporting people with dementia to find their way around and be comfortable in what may seem to them to be unfamiliar buildings.

On the day

People living with dementia may not recognise the village hall even if they have been regular attenders at events in the past. Clear signage both outside and inside the hall is therefore particularly helpful. At the start of the event or activity it is important that whoever is organising the session reminds attendees of the location of the fire exits and the toilets. If the event is expected to be attended by a large number of people or quite noisy it would also be helpful to remind the audience that there is a quiet space for them to use if they wish to step away from the main area of activity for a while. The event organiser should let the audience know when there are likely to be changes to lighting and sound levels, for example at the start or end of a film, before they happen so as not to unduly startle people when the noise levels and lights go up or down.

It would be helpful if at least one of the people organising the event is a Dementia Friend and able to keep an eye out for anybody who seems to be uncomfortable or is being excluded from a particular activity, so that they can be offered reassurance and support. Although people living with dementia will not want to be treated differently it is important that time is taken to recognise them as individuals, for example by speaking to them not just their carer, and by being understanding if they take more time to answer a question or do not answer at all.

With support, patience and understanding people living with dementia should be able to continue to enjoy a wide range of activities provided in the village hall. Provided it is safe to do so, being actively engaged in meal service or helping to run a stall at a fair, rather than watching others, can help to build confidence in undertaking activities of daily living. However, if a person living with dementia becomes agitated or distressed try to encourage them to move away from the main activity area and sit for a while in a quiet space.



People living with dementia may find it difficult to see things if they are the same colour as the background wall, for example handrails. Highly polished floors could look wet and slippery, and shadows can be misinterpreted as a change in floor level. For people living with dementia it is particularly important to provide orientation and wayfinding cues as impairments in cognitive function and decision making abilities mean that navigating a building, even if it is familiar, can be very challenging. Signage should include both pictures and text as some people may not be able to recognise words but can read text. The provision of a good size and easy-to-read clock can assist with orientation. Noise can also be very distracting and disorientating, and ideally the hall should provide a quiet area for those living with dementia to use.

The environmental checklist

The environmental checklist has been developed in partnership with the village halls who have participated in the pilot programme. It has been designed as an easy to use self-assessment tool to enable village halls to identify and record aspects of the physical environment that are known to be important to people living with dementia.

It is hoped that once the checklist has been completed the information obtained can be used to set priorities for action and to support any bids for improvement monies. The assessment can also be repeated at different times so that a village hall can measure the improvements they have been able to make.

The checklist has been developed to be as flexible as possible, recognising that village halls are unique buildings and not all of the questions will apply to every hall. It is not exhaustive, and space has been left for the addition of other elements that may be relevant to a specific building. A rationale for each of the elements has been provided as this has proved an important element in developing and encouraging an improved understanding of the needs of people living with dementia more generally.

The environmental checklist is divided into three sections:

- ▶ **Section 1:** General questions about the environment that apply across the whole of the village hall, such as lighting and decoration. It should be completed once a thorough walk round the building has been undertaken.
- ▶ **Section 2:** Specific questions about certain areas such as toilets and kitchens
- ▶ **Section 3:** Additional areas to consider, for example fixed or moveable staging.

In addition to the questions, the checklist contains a simple rating scale which can be used to indicate if the particular element has been 'Fully met' or there is 'Room for improvement'. If any of the questions are not relevant they should be marked as not applicable (N/A). The checklist can be used to measure progress over time, as well as before and after any refurbishment.

Dementia Friendly Village Halls – Environmental checklist

Section 1: General aspects of the environment

Lighting

Rationale: As people get older they need much higher light levels in order to see properly. For all ages, natural daylight is the best form of light as it promotes wellbeing and regulates human biological clocks (circadian rhythms). Older people will take much longer for their eyes to adjust to changes in light levels and they may have difficulty in coping with glare or shiny surfaces, which can look wet. Matt surface finishes are better for them. People living with dementia may interpret shadows or dark areas on the floor as holes and try to step over them. They may also find reflections from mirrors or shiny surfaces, including TV screens, disorientating.

Questions to consider:	Fully met	Room for improvement	N/A
Has natural light been maximised by ensuring that curtains and blinds are pulled back during the day?			
Is the level of lighting good in all areas?			
Are light levels consistent in order to reduce light pooling, shadows or glare?			
Have reflections from shiny surfaces been minimised?			
Has flickering from florescent light tubes been eliminated?			

Any additional comments:

Colour and Contrast

Rationale: The way people see colour depends on where it is on the colour spectrum, its vividness, its tone (light or dark), and also the lighting in the area. Older people tend to perceive colours as having increased yellowing shades, and colours with a similar tonal contrast will tend to blend together and they may also have other visual impairments. The ability to see details at low contrast levels is the most consistent visual deficit associated with dementia. The use of both colour and contrast are therefore critical elements of dementia friendly design. A high level of colour contrast between surfaces, fixtures, decoration, fittings, including door handles and locks, furniture and signage will enable people to better understand their environment. For example, chairs that are a different colour from the floor or handrails in a contrasting colour to the wall will enable them to be seen more clearly.

Questions to consider:	Fully met	Room for improvement	N/A
Does the colour of any handrails or grab rails contrast with the wall?			
Does the colour of tables and chairs, other furniture, curtains, flooring and any fittings offer sufficient colour contrast between surfaces?			
Does any signage offer good colour contrast from the surface to which it is attached?			

Any additional comments:

Interior Decoration – including flooring, furnishings and furniture

Rationale: Decoration and soft furnishings can play a significant part in making a building feel welcoming, and can also help to reduce unwanted sounds. However, people living with dementia may perceive patterns as actual objects either because of their size or the contrast between the image and its background. Strong realistic patterns, for example flowers, may look like the real thing, as can life size images on walls which can cause disorientation. Bold or striped patterns on furnishings can also look as though they are moving. Patterned flooring can also be problematic as, for example, white specks on a dark floor can look like scraps of paper that need to be picked up. Threshold strips, shadows or dark areas on floors, such as black door mats, can be perceived as changes in depth or holes and people may try to step over them. General clutter can also be distracting and cause sensory overload. Older people with reduced mobility require comfortable, fit for purpose furniture, including chairs with arms.

Questions to consider:	Fully met	Room for improvement	N/A
Has the use of highly patterned or striped fabrics or fabrics with realistic patterns been avoided?			
Are surfaces, furniture and furnishings matt and non-reflective?			
Is there a choice of furniture including chairs with arms?			
Is the flooring matt and of a consistent colour?			
Does the colour of the flooring contrast with the colour of the walls?			
Has the use of black floor mats which could be mistaken for holes in the floor been avoided?			
Are threshold strips a similar tone to both floor surfaces?			

Any additional comments:

Acoustics/Noise

Rationale: The majority of older people will experience some hearing loss and may become very sensitive to noise (unwanted sound). For people living with dementia, noise can cause confusion and sensory overload. Big spaces with high ceilings which produce an echo or those with multiple hard surfaces can be noisy and challenging. Carpeting, soft furnishings and curtains can help absorb noise, as can ceiling tiles. If possible a quiet area should be provided for people living with dementia to rest.

Questions to consider:	Fully met	Room for improvement	N/A
Has a hearing loop been installed?			
Is there a PA system if required?			
If there are any areas of the hall that are liable to echo have noise absorbent surfaces or materials such as carpet or curtains been used to deaden noise?			
Is there a quiet space away from the main hall for people to rest if needed?			

Any additional comments:

Signage and Artworks

Rationale: Older people and people living with dementia can easily become disorientated, but appropriately designed and displayed signage can assist them to navigate around a building. However, too many signs or cluttered notice boards can cause confusion and visual overload. Signs should include both pictures and text with a large font and provide good visual contrast between the text/symbols and the surface on which they are hung. Signs should be placed on doors, not beside them, to avoid confusion and at a height of 1.2m above floor level where people can see them easily. Artworks can assist with orientation and wayfinding but should have contrasting frames to the artwork and the wall so that they can be seen easily. Providing clocks will help with orientation.

Questions to consider:	Fully met	Room for improvement	N/A
Have signs only been used where necessary to help people navigate the building or locate safety equipment?			
Are signs and any artworks of sufficient size and hung at a height where they can be seen easily?			
Are signs placed on doors rather than on the surrounding wall?			
Are fire and emergency exits well signed?			
Is the location of first aid or safety equipment such as defibrillators clearly signed?			
Is there a large face clock easily visible in the main areas?			

Any additional comments:

Section 2: Specific Areas

Dining areas, kitchens, café and bars

Rationale: Nutrition and hydration are key to the maintenance of human wellbeing. People living with dementia may need to be encouraged to maintain their independence and life skills by continuing to participate and enjoy a range of activities including preparing food, eating and washing up. The ability to taste and smell are important senses that enable people to enjoy food, but they become less sensitive as people become older and the flavour of food may become less appetizing. However, eating with others can encourage both good nutrition and socialisation, enabling people to maintain a healthy diet and weight. Although many people living with dementia are able to eat and drink independently, some help may be needed as they may not recognise items such as crockery, cutlery or drinking glasses if they are of a non-traditional design. Distinguishing food on plates can also be difficult when there is little or no contrast between colours, for example pale food on a plain white plate. Organisers should be aware of the safety issues associated with kitchen appliances if people living with dementia are invited into the kitchen or bar area.

Questions to consider:	Fully met	Room for improvement	N/A
Are coloured crockery, cutlery and glasses available if needed?			
Are all any hazardous materials e.g. cleaning materials locked away?			
If the kitchen area is likely to be accessed by people with cognitive problems or people living with dementia: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are kitchen fixtures, fittings and any supplied appliances e.g. kettles of traditional design and easy to use? • Are surfaces including cupboard doors non-reflective? • Are appliances turned off and unplugged when not in use? 			

Any additional comments:

Toilets and shower areas

Rationale: For older people, not being able to find the toilet can cause anxiety, so good signage is particularly important. For people living with dementia, non-traditional fixtures and fittings such as taps or toilet flushes can be difficult to recognise or use, making them reluctant to use the toilet. Toilet seats and rails, taps and shower controls (if present) should offer sufficient colour contrast from surrounding surfaces so that they can be seen easily. Reflections in mirrors or on shiny surfaces can also be disorientating or alarming to people living with dementia as they may not recognise themselves or objects that are reflected. A noisy electric hand dryer can be very distracting so handtowels may be preferred.

The questions below relate to the DDA compliant toilet but are relevant to all toilets in the building that might be used by older people or people living with dementia.

Questions to consider:	Fully met	Room for improvement	N/A
Are there clear signs both into and out of the toilet?			
Is the toilet large enough to allow space for a wheelchair and a carer to assist with the door closed?			
Do the toilet seat and rails contrast with the sanitary ware and walls?			
Are the toilet door locks easy to find and use?			
Are fixtures and fittings such as toilet flushes and taps of traditional design and easy to use?			
Is the flooring matt and non-slip?			
Is it easy to reach the toilet roll when sitting on the toilet?			

Any additional comments:

Entrance, porches, hallways, reception areas and corridors

Rationale: Entrances and corridors are critical to supporting orientation for older people and people living with dementia. Not being able to find the entrance to a building can cause anxiety and it may be difficult for older people to use complex entry systems. Uncared for, poorly lit and cluttered spaces can be disorientating and confusing for people living with dementia, as well as being potential trip hazards. Any entrance steps or ramps should meet the required disability standards and have handrails and alternative access routes should be provided where necessary.

Questions to consider:	Fully met	Room for improvement	N/A
Does the approach to the village hall look friendly and feel welcoming?			
Is there a bench or seating near the entrance where people can wait?			
Is the entrance easy to find and access?			
If provided, is the reception desk accessible and easy to find?			
Are the corridors well-lit and free of clutter?			
Are noticeboards kept tidy and up to date?			

Any additional comments:

Section 3:

Additional areas that are relevant to the village hall

Each village hall has a unique design. While this checklist has been designed to be as inclusive as possible, there will be areas that are not included. For example, fixed or movable staging or the placing of fire hydrants. This section has been provided for each hall to note any particular areas that they feel are important in the context of making the village hall more dementia friendly. These concerns and suggestions can therefore be captured as part of the overall assessment.

Area	Comments or issues

