

YEARS AHEAD

A Report on Older Person Friendly Seating

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“YEARS AHEAD” - The North East Forum on Ageing

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Introduction

Years Ahead operates through a series of representative groups in the North East.

One of these, “The Elders Council of Newcastle City”, has (via its Older Person Friendly City Working Group) surveyed many items in the City which need to be considered in order to help towards making it more friendly to Older People. These include pavement condition, street obstructions, provision of toilets and proper seating.

In connection with seating the group established that there is a variety of public seating in the City and much of it uncoordinated and often unsuitable for the needs of older people. Continuing their research, members of the working group joined in a project set up by Design Network North together with Newcastle University and VOICENorth to try to come up with a design of a seat which would meet these needs

The working group concluded that the principal seating requirements for older people are:

- 1 A properly angled back.
- 2 Correct seat height.
- 3 Assistive armrests throughout.
- 4 Warm feel material.

Bonus items are:

- 1 Space for walking stick.
- 2 Space for shopping bag.
- 3 Cup holder.

Details of a prototype are shown in appendix 1 and a summary of the case study is given in appendix 3. Further details and copyright information are available from Mike Morgan, Business Development Manager, Newcastle Initiative on Changing Age, Newcastle University 0191 2081308 mike.morgan@ncl.ac.uk

Newcastle City Council is very interested in the prototype design and is in discussions with Newcastle University about potential implementation in the City.

Appendix 2 shows a variety of other seats we have come across which have some, but not all, of the features identified in the prototype.

It is hoped that planners and architects will consider this Report when reviewing the installation of public seating. For further background please feel free to contact me as below.

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Appendix 1 - Prototype.

A prototype can be seen at Biomedical Research Building, Campus for Ageing and Vitality, Nuns Moor Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 5PL



The composition of the original prototype was sustainable wood. However, there is an option to use recycled plastic in a range of colours.

Dimensions

Overall:

Height 825mm

Width 2650mm (end of bench to end of bench, excludes mounting base)

Depth 760mm (end of arm to back)

Seat:

Height 450mm (from ground)

Width 560mm (between armrests)



Appendix 2 - Examples of other seating with some older person friendly features.

2.1 Tyne and Wear Metro stations.



2.2 Gateshead old Town Hall



2.3 Billingham Town Centre



2.4 Hartlepool Rail Station



2.5 Kings Cross Rail Station



2.6 Thames embankment



Appendix 3 - Original Case Study



Design Network North Case Study: The Bench

Inclusive street furniture

The needs of the older population are often neglected during the design of products and services. Design Network North recognised this and set up an exemplar project with Newcastle University focussed on street furniture.

The aim of this project was to develop an age inclusive product, developed with and for older people by responding to their needs. It consisted of a partnership between Design Network North (DNN), VOICENorth, design company Butters Innovation, Miko Engineering a North East manufacturing company and facilitated by the Changing Age for Business team at Newcastle University supported by “Years Ahead” and “The Elders Council of Newcastle”.

Through Changing Age for Business, the design and manufacturing companies involved were able to participate in consultation with VOICENorth, academics, architects, estate planners and older people so the design could be tailored to the needs of the end users. The design is contemporary and includes a number of features that make it suitable for use by older people. It is a great example of user driven inclusive design and as such, is well positioned to address the needs and growing market created by an ageing society...

The Design Concept

Cost and visual appearance are usually the two main drivers in the design of street furniture and the end user is rarely involved in the process. Butters Innovation and Miko Engineering, with the aid of Newcastle University, engaged with VOICE North to ensure the needs of the older population were incorporated in the design from the outset.



Picture Caption: Business idea by Design Network North for a bench designed to be inclusive for an ageing society. Design by Butters Innovation
Manufactured by Miko Engineering

Life expectancy in the UK is increasing at an incredible rate. Newcastle University believes that an ageing society creates a fantastic business opportunity. People are living much longer and continue to need food, accommodation, clothing, transportation, finances, travel & leisure, health care and education. This demand needs to be met with new or modified inclusive products and services to meet the wider variation of needs and aspirations of older people. The fastest growing groups are the oldest - in 2008, 22% of the population were aged over 60 and by 2033 this is predicted to rise to 29%. By designing seating with the needs of older people in mind it is also intended that the design will be inclusive for people of all ages.

How the Bench will make a difference

There are a number of groups that need to be considered when looking at street furniture – including: the end users, architects and installers. Whilst a product needs to be visually appealing, it should, primarily, consider the needs of older people and be available at an affordable price.

The Design Process

VOICENorth provides a means to engage with a wide, representative range of people and their communities and to consult with them on key issues around ageing and demographic change. It provides real opportunities for older people to help shape future products and services.

Consulting VOICENorth and other older people via “Years Ahead” and “The Elders Council of Newcastle” alongside architects and estate planners meant the design was able to consider the needs of each of the groups. Many features were included that could otherwise have been missed such as seat height and multiple arm rests which provide functions which are of particular importance when designing to meet the needs of older people.

Planners and architects are particularly interested in maintenance, installation and visual appearance so by the team working together from concept to completion, a practical inclusive solution has been achieved.

Quote: Jonathan Butters of Butters Innovation says *“I worked closely with the Changing Age for Business and VOICENorth, and began holding consultation sessions with groups of older people who were interested in giving feedback to the project. It has been a rewarding and pleasurable experience. There is certainly a correlation between the amount of consultation and the success. Most designers use text books to look at ergo-dynamics, rather than asking people what they want. User-centred design reduces risk.”*

Jonathan Butters, Butters Innovation.

The Final Product

Following consultations, the Bench design has a number of features that make it suitable for use by older people. The height of the seat, the angle of the seat back and the arm rests have been designed with older users in mind. In addition, there is a groove to hold a walking stick, hooks for shopping bags and space for cups. The prototype has been produced in sustainable wood but recycled plastic could, as a “warm feel” material, also be used. The seating can be constructed easily and is ideal for most locations.

One of the most rewarding responses to the seat design is that, whilst it has been designed with older people in mind, it is actually a good design for many types of user. For example; a young family with a couple of children, a dog and some shopping bags would also find the features of the seat very useful.

Further details on Case Study and Copyright from Mike Morgan, Business Development Manager, Newcastle Initiative on Changing Age, Newcastle University 0191 2081308 mike.morgan@ncl.ac.uk

Changing Age for Business has successfully achieved a number of Business Engagement projects by linking businesses to the University. One that highlights the benefits is “the bench”, a project which identified that the needs of the older population are often neglected during the design of products and services.

