

## Ageing and the built environment: making an impact through research



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## Who am I?

- Trained as an architect and urban designer (Cambridge and Oxford Brookes), then took up an academic career
- Director of WISE (Wellbeing in Sustainable Environments) research unit
- WISE founded in 2004, with Lynne Mitchell
- Investigating impacts of the built environment on people's wellbeing, mental health and quality of life
- Based at Oxford Brookes University until Sept 09, then moved to Warwick



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## Who am I?

- Jointly appointed by 2 Schools, Engineering, and Health and Social Studies
- Research has focused on older people to date, but now extending to other ages and groups
- Aim to provide evidence-based guidance on designing buildings and places that optimise wellbeing
- WISE members: Prof. Elizabeth Burton (Director); Lynne Mitchell; David Ormandy; several associates and PhD students



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## How we seek to make an impact

- We take note of timely, topical issues and address these in long-term strategies for the future
  - Ageing society
  - Climate change and sustainable communities
  - Growing interest in wellbeing
  - Shift towards prevention of ill health rather than treatment of it within medicine (due to obesity concerns etc.)
- When planning a research project, we consider from the outset the ways it will contribute to practice and/or policy

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## How we seek to make an impact

- We make engagement with non-academics a priority, meeting up regularly with contacts to understand their own priorities, and setting up advisory groups for individual projects
- We make sure we understand, when developing a bid, what the interests of non-academic collaborators are – i.e. what they want out of the project. That way, we can try to ensure the methods deliver the appropriate findings
- We make sure that design recommendations of some kind are generated from each research project

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## How we seek to make an impact

- We produce our findings/design recommendations in forms that are easy to read and access:
  - Leaflets as well as papers, hard copies as well as electronic ones
  - Usually available via a project or research unit website
  - Using clear and accessible English, and tools such as checklists and diagrams where appropriate



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## How we seek to make an impact

We seek to make an impact in a variety of different ways

- By feeding into POLICY, including national and local policy, and policies of relevant organisations and bodies such as professional groups
- By influencing PRACTICE, e.g., by providing design guidance for use by architects, developers and urban designers, and by providing consultancy to design teams (offering evidence-based design guidance)

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## How we seek to make an impact

- By using opportunities for collaboration presented by TEACHING, e.g., for project work students can work with industry to develop ideas for the real world
- By contributing to the WIDER DEBATES, through international, interdisciplinary symposia etc.
- By influencing the DISCIPLINE or subject, pushing its boundaries and people's perceptions of it



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## How we seek to make an impact

- We pursue a range of dissemination activities:
  - Conferences, seminars and workshops
  - Findings posted or emailed to relevant bodies (e.g. Local authorities)
  - Press releases to advertise the research findings
  - Meetings with relevant policy makers and other interested groups



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## Impact on policy

Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)	EB and LM's 2006 book <i>Inclusive Urban Design: Streets for Life</i> (Architectural Press) referenced in WAG Final Interim Guidance Document: Planning and Inclusive Design (Access Statements).	Nov 2007
DCLG, DoH and DWP	WISE publications on designing built environment for older people with dementia quoted and referenced in <i>The National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society: Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods</i>	February 2008
RENEW Northwest	EB quoted in consultation document, <i>Places Matter. Housing Design and Mental Health: Some Lessons for Commissioners.</i>	March 2008

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## Impact on practice

- Neighbourhoods for Life recommendations being used by local authorities and by social housing providers
- We guide the design of individual projects (e.g. PFI bids)
- Plan to produce further design guidance for different contexts and buildings
- Ultimately want to create a kitemark or award for 'informed' design for wellbeing

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## Impact on the discipline

- Planning to set up a new type of training for architects and others involved in delivery of the built environment
  - Evidence-based or informed
  - Focusing on health and wellbeing
  - Interdisciplinary – or possibly a new discipline?
- Promoting teaching of health and the built environment (lobbying professional bodies etc.) – Education Network for healthier Settlements (UWE)
- Seeking to influence attitudes to built environment more broadly – public health, government investment

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## Recent WISE research projects

- Neighbourhoods for Life project (EPSRC)
- Urban regeneration and mental health project (Wellcome Trust)
- I'DGO consortium (EPSRC)
- Care homes project (Department of Health)



## Neighbourhoods for Life

- Aim to find out how to design outdoor environments to enable older people with dementia to use and enjoy them
- Methods: in-depth interviews, accompanied walks, measurement of design of participants' local neighbourhoods
- Findings: 17 key design recommendations for designing 'Neighbourhoods for Life'



## Neighbourhoods for Life

- Neighbourhoods that residents find easy and enjoyable to use as they grow older in them, allowing them to stay living at home if they want to
- Neighbourhoods that are inclusive – easy and enjoyable to use by all members of society, regardless of age/ability

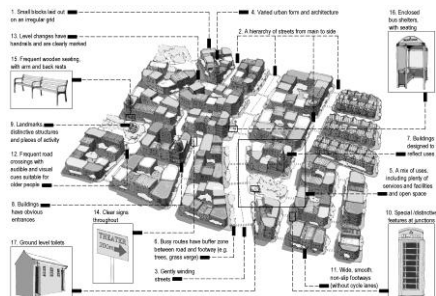


## Neighbourhoods for Life

- Some quotes about going out:
  - I feel great, I would live out
  - I rejoice
  - I feel in charge of myself
  - The world belongs to me just for that bit of time
  - I get claustrophobic if I don't go out
  - It's very comforting

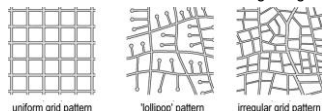


## Neighbourhoods for Life



## Neighbourhoods for Life

- Some examples of recommendations:
  - Small blocks laid out on an irregular grid



- Buildings/facilities designed to reflect uses (familiarity & legibility)
- Wide, smooth, non-slip footways (without cycle lanes)



## I'DGO

- Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors
  - 2 other academic partners: OPENSspace at Edinburgh College of Art & Heriot-Watt University; and SURFACE at University of Salford
  - Wide range of non-academic partners and collaborators
- Aim: to find out how urban form affects older people's quality of life, and to identify urban design characteristics that are most positive



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## I'DGO

- Methods: for a large sample of older people in a range of different locations, measured aspects of their quality of life, plus measured urban form characteristics of their neighbourhoods, then investigated relationships between them
- Asked direct questions about how urban form affects people, through in-depth questions using photographs as prompts



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## I'DGO

- Urban form is a significant, if small, influence on older people's wellbeing
- Claims about advantages of higher-density, urban living generally not supported
- Wellbeing seems to be best for older people in low density, green areas – usually villages and small towns
- High densities not necessarily –ve. For certain aspects of wellbeing, moderate densities appear to be more –ve than high or low



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## I'DGO

- Neighbourhoods with a moderate amount of greenery seem to perform well: –ve impacts stem mainly from having small amount
- A fine grain mix of uses was found to be more +ve than clusters of different uses
- Residential areas with occasional other uses seem to offer significant potential, many +ves but few of the -ves



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## I'DGO

- It may be possible to make urban housing more attractive to older people by:
  - Increasing amount of greenery – some much better than none
  - Controlling non-motorised traffic effectively
  - Creating predominantly residential areas that have facilities and amenities scattered within them
  - Using distorted grid layouts
- See [www.idgo.ac.uk](http://www.idgo.ac.uk) for more findings and information



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## Current WISE research projects

- I'DGO TOO (EPSRC; 2007-2011)
- Staff morale on psychiatric in-patient wards (DoH; 2007-2010)
- COGWORKS: interventions for healthy cognitive ageing (MRC network to prepare full bid; 2009-10)
- CityForm India (EPSRC network; 2010-2012)



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## I'DGO TOO

- I'DGO 1 focused on neighbourhood; 2<sup>nd</sup> phase focuses on gardens/private outdoor space
- Studies have shown importance of private outdoor space for older people
- Sustainable communities/urban renaissance agenda requiring higher-density housing on urban land – where space at a premium, garden space likely to be lost



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## I'DGO TOO

- Implications of urban renaissance for older people not yet investigated – claimed benefits not tested
- Aim: to find out how best to design the private outdoor spaces around housing for older people, to optimise residents' wellbeing
- Residential outdoor space includes:
  - Outdoor space attached to housing developments



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## I'DGO TOO

- Private gardens, shared gardens, balconies, terraces, courtyards, verandahs, parking areas, outdoor storage areas (for bins, gardening equipment etc.)
- Aspects of design to be considered:
  - Type/form of landscaping
  - Proportion of area given over to different uses
  - Orientation of spaces
  - Detailed design of different spaces
  - Connections between indoors and outdoors
  - Thresholds between public and private space
  - Views of space from inside housing
  - Relationship with street/neighbourhood



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## Key lessons

- Plan ahead for making an impact
- Be clear where and how you want to make an impact
- Think big – seek to influence thinking beyond policy and practice if appropriate
- Communicate well with non-academic partners
- Be resilient – it is not always easy!
- Persevere . . .

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