



# Age Friendly Athboy

How walkable and accessible is Athboy town with a focus on people with cognitive impairment and dementia





# Acknowledgements

The Meath Age Friendly Programme commenced in 2011, and launched its first strategy in 2012. The programme is hosted under the leadership of Meath County Council Chief Executive Jackie Maguire and operates within the World Health Organization framework. The programme is built on the recognition of the valuable role that older people can and should play in shaping communities for the better by asking them to participate in the decision making process and being responsive to their suggestions.

This specific project was driven by a team from Prosper Meath, Age Friendly Ireland, the Meath Age Friendly Programme, and Dementia: Understand Together, the national dementia awareness campaign. The work was spearheaded by Cllr David Gilroy of Meath County Council. We wish to acknowledge the support from technical experts Fiona Walsh of DDS Architects and Derek Whyte, consultant planner. Sincere thanks are due to all of the community and voluntary groups and individuals who participated in the walkability audit and who attended the community feedback meeting.



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# Welcome Message



Cllr. David Gilroy  
Cathaoirleach,  
Meath County Council

As Cathaoirleach of Meath County Council I am privileged to be the host of the Age Friendly Ireland national shared service, which is a key mission in our current government's Programme for Government 2020. The Shared Service delivers the national Age Friendly Programme and supports 31 local authority led multi-disciplinary programmes. It also represents Ireland on a global platform as the first Age Friendly Country in the world.

Living as part of a strong community offers many people positive, quality of life aspects. Being part of a vibrant town or village brings with it the ability to gain, to contribute and to belong. Participation in one's community forms the core to this value and the key to participation is access. When most of us go about our day we take little time to consider how we interact with our local environment. We often take it for granted.

How differently we would see the world if what we once took for granted became more difficult. If our ability to understand or make sense of our surroundings gradually became depleted. If the once familiar became strange. How would we see our lives then?

The Athboy Walkability audit involved our town being divided into a number of routes with local groups assessing these routes from the perspective of people with lessened motor or cognitive abilities. What added to the uniqueness of the Athboy project was its particular emphasis on people affected by dementia.

Dementia is a range of conditions that cause damage to the brain resulting in people having difficulty interacting with the world around them. As the number of people with dementia is projected to increase into the future, it is imperative that we make considerations now and by doing so we can ensure that our communities can meet the needs of all our neighbours, friends and family in the years to come.

The Age Friendly Approach is to bring older people into the process to co-design solutions with the decision-makers. This very much underpins the approach to the Athboy walkability and all findings and recommendations are made in a positive spirit of collaboration.

# Introduction

The Age Friendly Ireland walkability audit is a method of involving citizens in an assessment of the physical environment of their community. Age Friendly Ireland, a shared service of local government hosted by Meath County Council, promotes Age Friendly walkability audits across the country, to support local authorities in ensuring their communities are Age Friendly and accessible for everyone.

Dementia: Understand Together, the national dementia awareness campaign hosted by the Health Service Executive, aims to raise a better awareness and understanding of dementia and to inspire communities to support and include people with dementia and their families.

The walkability audit in Athboy, County Meath was a pilot project to develop a better understanding of how to assess communities from the perspective of a person with dementia in future audits and to take the physical, cognitive and sensory difficulties a person may experience into consideration.

This report documents the findings of the walkability audit carried out in Athboy town in July 2019 that used the Age Friendly Ireland toolkit and specialist knowledge and input from a chartered architect who specialises in designing dementia inclusive environments.

## What is a walkability audit?

A walkability audit involves a group of people getting together and walking a short, planned route in order to assess it for how easy or difficult it is to walk that way. A walkability audit is usually the first step in the process of developing an Age Friendly Town. It involves bringing a group of individuals with different abilities and needs through the public space, and documenting any issues encountered. A walkability audit gives a broad understanding of the community's perspective on how to develop the town by looking at things such as footpaths, seating, lighting, signage and the use of public space.

## Who was involved in the Athboy project?

The Athboy walkability audit was organised by the Meath Age Friendly Programme, Prosper Meath, Dementia: Understand Together, Age Friendly Ireland, and Meath County Council as represented by Cllr David Gilroy.

### Participants in the walkability were from the following groups:

Men's Shed  
 Irish Countrywomen's Association  
 Active Retirement  
 Women's groups  
 Disability support groups  
 Tidy Towns Committee  
 Business association  
 Meath Laterlife Network  
 Meath County Council staff  
 Health Service Executive staff  
 Muiroisa Foundation  
 Alzheimer's Society  
 Meath Partnership

A wide range of age groups and abilities were represented on the day, including children and young people, older people, and people with disabilities.

## Objectives of the Project

This report documents a public participation process to identify difficulties people may experience in accessing the town and its facilities, and potential solutions and design interventions to enhance inclusivity of the public realm.

The objectives of the report are to increase awareness of the experiences of older people, people with dementia and others amongst the population in accessing their community, focusing on the physical, cognitive and sensory impairments they may have.

The findings of this report can inform urban designers, architects, engineers, planners, community groups and developers who intend to improve, develop, repair or maintain the urban environment of Athboy.

## Map of walkability routes in Athboy



Route 1 Main Street and Sráid an Droichid Íochtarach

Route 2 Fair Green and Radharc na Páirce

Route 3 Main Street from Darnley Lodge to veterinary hospital

Route 4 Convent Community Centre to graveyard and Connaught Street

## Overview of Athboy

Athboy is a small town in County Meath that serves a large rural hinterland. It is situated in the West of the county. The 2016 Census of Population indicated a population of 2,445 people living in the town. About one fifth of the population (21%) are aged 55 and over, while 14% have a disability.

The town is relatively compact with the town centre area arranged along the Main Street with buildings consisting of mainly commercial, institutional, office, residential and public buildings.

Athboy has a primary school, a secondary school, a childcare centre, a community facility, a parochial hall, and a public library. Its sports facilities include GAA grounds and soccer pitch, basketball and tennis courts.

The goal of the Athboy written statement in the County Development Plan is “To consolidate and strengthen the town through the provision of a well-defined and compact town centre area, the promotion of a range of land-uses to support the residential population of the town and its role as a ‘service centre’ to the surrounding local area and through the enhancement of the considerable built heritage of the town by public realm improvements and tackling dereliction and underutilised properties.”

Four routes were selected along the roads indicated in blue on the study map above. These routes took in the main commercial and community services and recreational areas that are available to the community of Athboy.

# Dementia Explained

Dementia is a syndrome, an overarching term used to describe a wide range of symptoms associated with the deterioration or disease of the brain. Symptoms differ from person to person and change as the underlying disease progresses. People with dementia can experience physical, cognitive and sensory impairments. To design and build to support their needs we must first understand the challenges they face in our existing built environments.

## 1. Physical impairments

People living with dementia can experience reduced mobility and difficulties with balance. Day-to-day activities such as walking, standing and sitting become increasingly difficult as the disease progresses.

## 2. Cognitive impairments

Dementia reduces cognitive ability; memory, reasoning, judgement, planning, focus, decision making etc., can all be affected. This can lead to a person with dementia experiencing difficulties in finding their way around and interacting with their environment and the people within it. We can support cognitive function through good design. We can design intuitive, predictable, legible and familiar environments. We can also provide cues, prompts and signage to support memory and wayfinding.

## 3. Sensory impairments

Dementia can reduce the ability to see, hear, taste, smell and touch. This effects how a person experiences and engages with their environment. For example: Blind and partially sighted people start to rely on other senses to compensate for their visual impairments - sound, touch, smell, taste to make sense of the world. 80% of the visually impaired can use their remaining sight to interpret spaces if they are designed to support visual understanding.

People with sensory impairments can find it difficult to understand and filter multiple simultaneous sensory stimuli and become confused. Our primary goal should be to deliver relevant information without creating auditory or visual clutter which will confuse, distract and ultimately lead to frustration and withdrawal. We can use design including light, colour, contrast, signage etc., to compensate for lost abilities and support people to better understand and read their environment.

Accessibility is the foundation on which we can start to build inclusive environments. Every environment should be designed to support the needs of people living with cognitive, sensory and physical impairments.

## Detailed Findings

The Athboy walkability project identified many positive features of the town which support its ambition to become an Age Friendly community in which people can live and age well, and that is mindful of the difficulties people with physical, cognitive and sensory issues may have in accessing facilities and amenities.

### **Athboy's existing strengths include:**

- Wide footpaths along the Main Street and in other areas
- Green areas with potential for development
- Strong community spirit and volunteerism
- An engaged business community
- Public seating
- Historic and heritage value of the town
- Bus connections through the town (Bus Eireann and Local Link)
- A strong local Age Friendly Programme in County Meath
- Political leadership in seeking to develop Athboy as Age Friendly
- New local authority housing with universal design features
- Free on street car parking in all areas
- Support of community ambition to become an Age Friendly Community
- Excellent community facilities in the Convent Community Centre

Notwithstanding the above, there were areas identified as having scope for improvement. These are discussed in the following sections.

## Footpaths

The audit saw some issues along the routes but these are found in any town or village. In a few areas participants saw some uneven surfaces, occasional gaps in paving material and crumbling/damaged kerb edges which could be due to cars parking on kerbs.

Where footpaths were generous and wide, there was a tendency for cars to park on them, encroaching on the space for pedestrians and damaging the structural integrity of the footpath.

As Athboy is a Heritage Town, some heritage towns can tend to have small open drains running along or in the centre of footpaths. It was noted some downpipes drained directly onto the footpath which could lead to surface glare or icy conditions during wet or winter weather.

Some litter was observed in areas including dog fouling, despite regular street cleaning by the local authority.

Low hanging branches and overgrown hedges impeded pedestrian access on some routes.

### Key recommendations for footpaths:

- ✓ Footpaths should have a sound, firm, slip-resistant and reasonably smooth surface
- ✓ Paths should be free of physical obstructions
- ✓ Visual clutter, such as excess signage, flashing signs should be minimised. For people with cognitive and sensory impairments, visual clutter on paved surfaces can be as debilitating as physical obstacles
- ✓ Surface colour of footpaths should be uniform as changes in colour can be misinterpreted as changes in level, holes or obstacles
- ✓ Pedestrian footpaths should have a clear detectable edge (e.g. wall, building line, kerb edge) which can be followed by people with cognitive or sensory impairments
- ✓ Dropped kerbs should be provided consistently to ensure a continue accessible route

### Examples of issues identified with footpaths in Athboy



Uneven colour on footpath surfaces can be misinterpreted as holes or changes in level by someone with sensory or cognitive impairments.



Various issues were identified with footpaths on the day of the Walkability Audit. Many of these have since been addressed with footpath resurfacing work.



Resurfaced path connecting graveyard to the town



Resurfaced path in the town centre

# Street furniture

Street furniture such as signposts, utility boxes, seating, poles, and rubbish bins can cause a physical obstruction to walkers if incorrectly located. Additionally for people with cognitive and sensory impairment, street furniture that has low colour contrast against its background is difficult to see or interpret, in the environment. Street furniture with a reflective surface also creates a problem for people with cognitive or sensory impairments.

In Athboy, participants on the walkability audit drew attention to the location of certain utility boxes and ESB poles. Street furniture should have a clearly designated zone or line to form a predictable path to follow. Shop owners placed advertising material, chairs, tables and merchandise on the footpaths. Bicycle were observed secured to trees and posts in Athboy.

## Key recommendations for street furniture:

- ✓ Street furniture should be placed in a clearly delineated zone, in line with each other along the length of a pedestrian route in order to create a clear and predictable layout for the user
- ✓ Street furniture could contrast visually against its background
- ✓ Materials used for street furniture should not have highly reflective surfaces
- ✓ Overhanging items (e.g. hanging baskets, signs) should be above 2500mm
- ✓ The recommended height for utility boxes is 1000mm

## Example of shop items on pedestrian route



Example of utility boxes located on footpath where alternative space was available.



Obstacles on footpaths make it more difficult for pedestrians to access the town, and particularly so for people with limited mobility or cognitive or sensory issues.

# Traffic and Parking

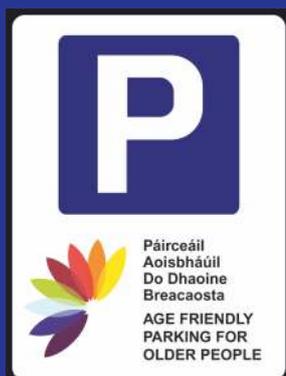
Car parking in Athboy was identified as particularly problematic, with numerous examples of cars parking on footpaths observed on the day of the walkability. Parking on footpaths not only impedes pedestrian access to services, but it requires pedestrians to leave the safety of the footpath to manoeuvre around parked vehicles. It may also result in damage to the footpath surface and kerb, which can in turn present a trip and fall hazard.

It was noted that commuters park for extended time periods on Main Street, taking up parking spaces for local services customers.

There were many observations of cars parked on clearways or pulling in at particular 'hot spots' outside the bank ATM machine and beside shops and fast food outlets. Inconsiderate parking has a major impact on the inclusivity of the town.

## Key recommendations for car parking:

- ✓ Cars should not park on footpaths or overhang the footpath when parked in bays
- ✓ Age Friendly and accessible parking to be provided close to essential services, such as pharmacy, post office, doctor's surgery
- ✓ There should be a clear parking policy in the town and enforcement of parking restrictions
- ✓ Car parking must not impede line of sight at pedestrian crossing points
- ✓ Appropriate car parking facilities to be provided for commuters who travel by bus ('park and ride' facilities)



## Examples of issues identified with parking on footpaths in Athboy





Many examples of traffic management issues in the town were identified during the walkability.



Bollards installed as part of upgrade work to address traffic management issues and prevent parking on footpaths.

# Signage and Wayfinding

Signage and wayfinding in Athboy can be improved. A fundamental principle of Age Friendliness is to be able to find your way around without assistance, at every stage of your life. Asking for and following directions can be particularly challenging for a person with a cognitive or sensory impairment. Walkability participants noticed examples of key services such as the Primary Care Centre that could be signposted. Advertising signs for businesses, on the other hand, were plentiful and in some cases cluttered the street.

## Key recommendations for signage:

- ✓ Clear signage should be planned for all areas of the town with a consistent design
- ✓ Direction signage should be provided at decision points and changes of direction
- ✓ Best practice in universal design for signage should be followed in terms of font, colour, size, position, height etc.
- ✓ Signage should not cause an obstruction to pedestrians or lead to visual clutter
- ✓ Signage that includes symbols or pictures supports wayfinding for people with cognitive impairment
- ✓ Signage needs to be cleaned and maintained regularly (for example, by removal of overgrown shrubs)

## Example of a street sign being too low to the ground



Flashing sign issue



# Accessible Toilets

There are no public toilets in Athboy, although toilet facilities are available in the Convent Community Centre, the library, and in local businesses. Some walkability participants noted that they feel uncomfortable using toilet facilities in shops when they do not intend to make a purchase. Access to toilet facilities is essential to the town being inclusive of all age groups and all abilities.

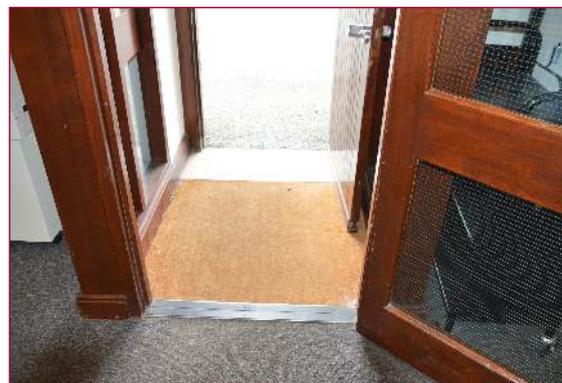
Age Friendly toilets are particularly important for people with physical, cognitive and sensory issues. Accessible toilets should be easy to find and identify, so people can access them easily and in time. Signage to toilets is important in this regard.

The community of Athboy developed a superb 'Changing Places' toilet facility in the Convent Community Centre. This is a fantastic achievement for a community centre run by volunteers. The walkability audit process identified some improvements that should be made to this toilet facility, such as improving visual contrast, and an issue with the access ramp and steps to the front of the building. The public library also has an accessible toilet, but the entrance lobby is not large enough for independent access by someone using a wheelchair. Some upgrade work to both facilities would enhance their accessibility for people with cognitive, sensory and physical impairments.

## Key recommendations for accessible toilets:

- ✓ Accessible toilet facilities should be available to the public on or near to the Main Street
- ✓ Directional signage to toilet facilities should be placed at appropriate locations
- ✓ Local businesses should be encouraged to make their toilet facilities available to the public via the Age Friendly Business Recognition Programme
- ✓ Existing community toilet facilities should be upgraded to provide visual contrast
- ✓ Toilet facilities and their approach route to meet Universal Design Guidelines as per Building for Everyone
- ✓ Surface finishes in toilet facilities should not be reflective or produce glare as these are disorienting for someone with cognitive or sensory impairments
- ✓ The development works planned for Fair Green Park should incorporate provision of toilet facilities

## Example of accessibility issues





Existing toilet facilities in Athboy, whilst very accessible, require colour contrast to make them accessible for people with visual or cognitive impairment



Example of good visual contrast in accessible toilets

## Public transport

Athboy has two bus service providers, LocalLink Flexibus (the Rural Transport Programme under the National Transport Authority) and Bus Éireann. The stopping points are beside and opposite the Darnley Lodge Hotel for Bus Éireann and St. James' Church Car Park for LocalLink. The walkability audit identified areas for improvement with the Bus Éireann stopping points on the main street. Their current locations on Main Street contributes to traffic congestion. Buses stop in the line of traffic for passengers to embark and disembark. Bus stopping points in Athboy require signage, shelter and seating. Public transport is essential for an Age Friendly community. People may lose their ability to drive with the advancement of cognitive, sensory deficits or other conditions associated with ageing. Public transport services should be easy to find and use, with timetable information being readily accessible. The lack of an easily identifiable bus stop with information displayed prevents access and use for some potential passengers. For some people, public transport is their only means to access essential services.

### Key recommendations for bus stops:

- ✓ Bus stops should be clearly signed and have timetable information available
- ✓ There should be a dedicated pull in zone on which the bus can stop
- ✓ The bus boarding point should allow the bus to stop as close to the kerb as possible to reduce horizontal stepping distance
- ✓ Passengers should have an Age Friendly Bus Stop with a dedicated waiting area with seating and shelter. Seating should incorporate arm rests and back support
- ✓ Illumination should be provided to allow passengers to read the information posted
- ✓ Information displays should be made of non-reflective materials
- ✓ Additional bus stops should be provided near to 'park and ride' facilities for drivers





## Parks and Recreational Areas

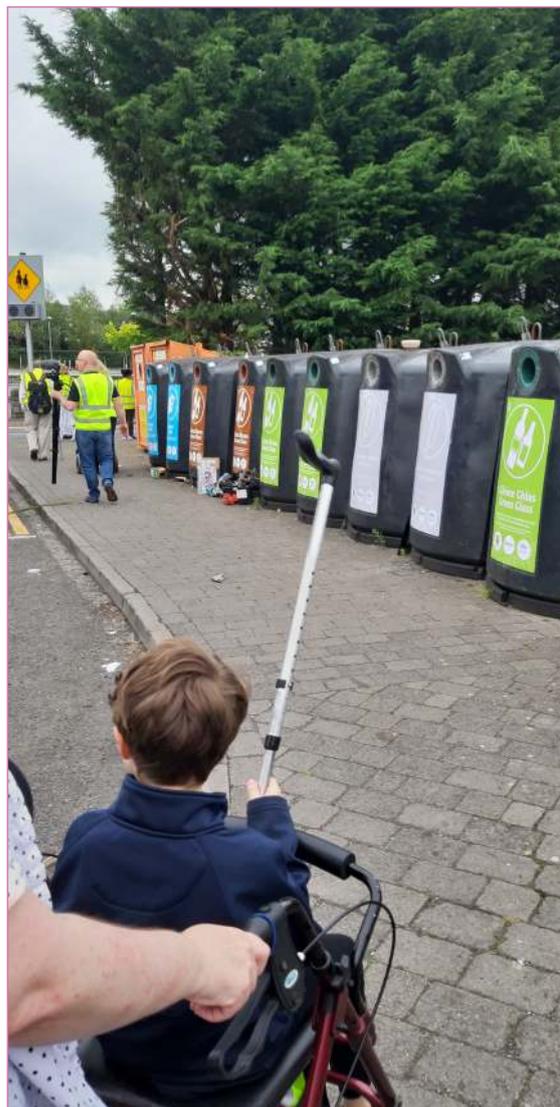
Athboy is fortunate to have three parks. The Fair Green Park is a large open space near the centre of town. It is regularly used by all members of the community. Heritage Garden is a small park on the edge of town with a gravel path and stone benches. The playground, Coille Dios is approached by a steep loose gravel path. It is difficult to access by all users due to the steep gradient.

Public parks are places to exercise and socialise. Access to recreational opportunities is important to support health and wellbeing. If universal design principles are followed parks can provide recreational areas for all user groups.

Upgrade works has been completed in the Fair Green.

### Key recommendations for parks and recreational areas:

- ✓ Parks to have accessible paths throughout to facilitate all users
- ✓ Paths to have a minimum clear width of 1200mm with suitable passing bays provided
- ✓ Unbonded gravel should not be used as a surface and path edges should provide visual contrast to give guidance for people with cognitive and sensory impairments
- ✓ Seating and resting points to be provided
- ✓ Clear and accessible signage to be provided including tactile signage
- ✓ Access to a toilet is a requirement for an inclusive environment
- ✓ Sensory experiences can be incorporated (e.g. wind chimes, sensory garden)





# Seating

Public seating is important as it allows people to take necessary rest periods when walking through their community. Public seating also creates a welcoming space for the community.

## Key recommendations for public seating:

- ✓ Public seating provided regularly particularly in areas with heavy footfall
- ✓ Public seating should be provided at the top and bottom on an incline to facilitate rest periods
- ✓ Seating should contrast visually with the background against which it is seen
- ✓ Seating should be approached on a level surface with no change in level between the path and the platform on which the seating is provided
- ✓ An accessible space should be provided for a wheelchair user in the general seating area
- ✓ Public seating should have back support and arm rests to make it easier for people to use it
- ✓ The seat height should be between 450mm and 480mm
- ✓ Consider the microclimate of the area. Wind breeze and strong direct sunlight can make the seats unusable
- ✓ Be aware of positive (birdsong) and negative noise (heavy traffic) in the area in which you wish to locate the seat



Old seating was replaced with new Age Friendly seating following the Walkability Audit

*For more detailed information on Universal Design seating, see Building for Everyone Volume 1: External Environment and Approach*



New seating installed in Fair Green as part of the improvements in the town

# Key Recommendations

The combined findings from the walkability reports produced by Derek Whyte and Fiona Walsh have led to recommendations for the public realm space of Athboy.

On developing Athboy as Age Friendly with specific focus on dementia and cognitive impairment, the steering group has identified four key areas of focus.

## Main Street

Main street is the commercial centre of the town with both retail and essential services provided along its length. Main Street is a section of the busy national secondary roads N51 that runs through the heart of the town. The centre of town has wide tree lined footpaths. The main street is the backbone that links all the secondary routes across the town.

It can be difficult to negotiate the street should there be obstructions on the footpath, issues with some crossing points, parked cars, few public seats, signage and access to toilets. Any or all of the above make it difficult for people ageing or living with cognitive, sensory and/or physical impairments to access the town. They are barriers to inclusion.

### Recommended actions:

- Remove unnecessary physical and visual clutter from the footpaths and designate clear zones for street furniture, and only place essential advertising and merchandise on the footpaths.
- Enforce parking restrictions and install additional bollards where necessary to prevent cars parking on the footpaths.
- Clean and repair drainage gullies on Main Street.
- Installation of big belly bins.
- Provide accessible seating at regular intervals where space allows and at the base and top of sloped routes.
- Surfaces, kerbs, dropped crossing point and service covers should be repaired and/or upgraded.
- Tree pits should be upgraded with bonded permeable surface.
- Existing street furniture should be upgraded to contrast with the background against which it is viewed.
- Provide bicycle stands in a safe and convenient location.
- Provide dementia inclusive signage to guide and direct people to facilities and services.
- Provide an accessible toilet and/or signage to existing toilet facilities in the town.
- Review and upgrade three major junctions: Ollies Corner, Cosy Corner and the Main Street to Library junction.

## Convent Community Centre

The Convent Community Centre (CCC) is an important facility for all the community. It is a working testament to the community spirit and volunteer commitment in Athboy. It is used by many of the town's residents and people from the surrounding area. It is used by people of all ages and abilities.

The new 'Changing Places Toilet' is listed on the national Changing Places Ireland website. To have this facility is an amazing achievement for a volunteer group. To provide universal access to the CCC would be a very worthwhile endeavour.

#### **Recommended actions:**

- The access route to and from Main Street to the Convent Community Centre should be reviewed. The local Health Centre is on this route and upgrades will also benefit its users.
- A 'wayfinding' strategy, i.e. the best and safest route to get from A to B in the town including signage, crossing, points, and seating should be developed with local stakeholder participation.
- Age Friendly signage to guide people to and from the Convent Community Centre and Changing Places Toilet to the town centre.
- Pedestrians leaving/entering the Convent Community Centre at the main gate should exit/enter onto the footpath and not the road. The existing path should be extended and dropped kerbs provided as necessary.
- The ramp and steps at the main entrance to the centre should be upgraded to meet the minimum standards outlined in Technical Guidance Document, Part M, Access and Use.
- The Changing Places Toilet should be upgraded to provide the recommended contrast required for universal use and as recommended by Technical Guidance Document, Part M, Access and Use.
- Providing an Age Friendly parking bay and other parking adjacent to the Health Centre would reduce the need for people to park on the footpaths.

#### **Bus Stop and Parking Zone**

One of the major issues identified in Athboy was the lack of a dedicated pull in zone for buses using the town. Buses currently stop in the line of traffic, causing traffic disruption and potentially impacting on pedestrian safety.

#### **Recommended actions:**

- Develop a dedicated Age Friendly bus stop near the church to include pull in zone, bus shelter, seating, lighting and signage.
- Incorporate a bus turning zone in this new space.

#### **Fair Green Park and Cow Park**

The Fair Green Park is a much loved and frequently used amenity in the town. Participants in the walkability audit pointed out that there was no safe parking or toilets available which made using the park difficult for them. Footpaths and seating have been upgraded in the Fair Green. All planned works should be designed and built with universal access in mind and provide for the needs of people living with cognitive, sensory and physical impairments.

#### **Recommended actions:**

- Age Friendly signage
- Sensory planting
- Accessible parking or age friendly parking bay near a level access entrance
- A shelter to protect from the elements, sun, wind and rain
- Access to toilet facilities

## Conclusion and Next Steps

Athboy is on a journey to becoming an Age Friendly town for everyone, which is inclusive of all groups, including people with cognitive and sensory as well as physical impairments. The findings of the walkability audit were used to inform a submission to the Public Realm Plan for Athboy Town which was published in 2020. The priorities for the town are the bus stopping area, the main street, signage and way finding, parks and green areas and community facilities. A funding application which drew on the walkability's recommendations was submitted by Meath County Council to the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund. This grant award of over €600,000 (August 2020) will enable the design of streetscaping and public realm work in the town, addressing many of the areas identified through this walkability process.

Through the new Public Realm Plan for Athboy, work will continue with stakeholders such as community groups and businesses within the town.

### Actions completed to date in Athboy Town:

- Footpath upgrading in the town
- Installation of bollards to address parking issues
- Removal of low hanging branches
- Footpath upgrading and installation of seating in Fair Green Park
- New accessible footpath installed around Cow Park for all age groups.

### Funding Sources

Upgrade works completed to date in Athboy were funded through the following sources:

#### Town & Village Renewal Scheme [2017-€100k]

Improvement works to the Community Convent to make it more accessible to all ages and abilities. The works included upgrading of windows to ensure energy efficiency and upgrading of the existing toilet facilities to allow for disabled access which now includes a "Changing Station" (special needs changing/hoist/shower facility). The grant was also used to create a digital hub within the building for commercial use.

#### Community Enhancement Programme [2018-€17,840 | 2019-€2,043 | 2020-€1,618]

These allocations went towards the continuous improvement and upgrading works of the Community Convent.

#### Town & Village Renewal Scheme [2018-€200k]

Upgrading 700m of footpath and seating in the Fairgreen to ensure accessibility by all ages and abilities and construction of a 1.5m looped walking path in the Cowpark.

While walkability audits have been conducted by Age Friendly Programmes across Ireland for many years, the unique process of incorporating dementia specific technical expertise in Athboy has generated a new layer of understanding that can be applied to future walkability audits.

In line with population ageing, there will be greater numbers of people with dementia living in the community, and it is therefore appropriate to plan public realm spaces that also meet the needs of this cohort of the population.

It is hoped that local Age Friendly Programmes and local authorities in general can utilise the learning in this report to inform future walkability audits.

## Appendix 1 - References

- Age Friendly Ireland Public Realm Guidelines
- Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, Building for Everyone
- [www.agefriendlyireland.ie](http://www.agefriendlyireland.ie)
- World Health Organization, Age Friendly Cities Checklist
- WHO Framework

## Appendix 2 - Top ten tips for dementia inclusive environments

**01 Signage** - ensure signage is clear and visible. Don't forget outdoor signage.

**02 Landmarks** - can help people find their way around.

**03 Space** - ensure there is plenty of space to walk around easily.

**04 A quiet space** - can bring great relief to a distressed/vulnerable customer.

**05 Seating** - Having somewhere to sit down can also be a great help.

**06 Bathrooms and Changing rooms** - Dementia friendly bathrooms and changing rooms can be very helpful for people with dementia and their loved ones.

**07 Vision** - Be aware of how a shiny or patterned floor, or changes in texture may look to a person with dementia. Mirrors may also cause confusion or distress to some people with dementia.

**08 Lighting** - Good lighting makes a big difference - make use of natural light if possible.

**09 Noise** - Be aware of how some noises can be distracting and confusing to a person with dementia

**10** Remember, a good environment for a person with dementia is a good environment for everyone!

## Appendix 3 - Biographies

### Report content provided by:

Fiona Walsh, DDS Architect for and on behalf of the Health Service Executive led Dementia: Understand Together campaign

Derek Whyte, Consultant Planner for and on behalf of Age Friendly Ireland



#### **Fiona Walsh, BArch, FRIAI, RIBA, ARB**

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[www.gbhi.org](http://www.gbhi.org)

Fiona is a Chartered Architect, graduating from UCD in Dublin. She has extensive experience in healthcare, residential care, social housing, commercial and ecclesiastical architecture. She now specialises in design and consultancy in the field of inclusive design, focusing on designing environments for people live with cognitive and sensory impairments. Her architectural experience combined with her neuroscience fellowship training gives her a unique insight and understanding to design supportive and enabling environments to assist people living with dementia to live with dignity, independence and autonomy. Her mission is to supports people living with dementia to stay valued and actively engaged members of their home communities for longer.

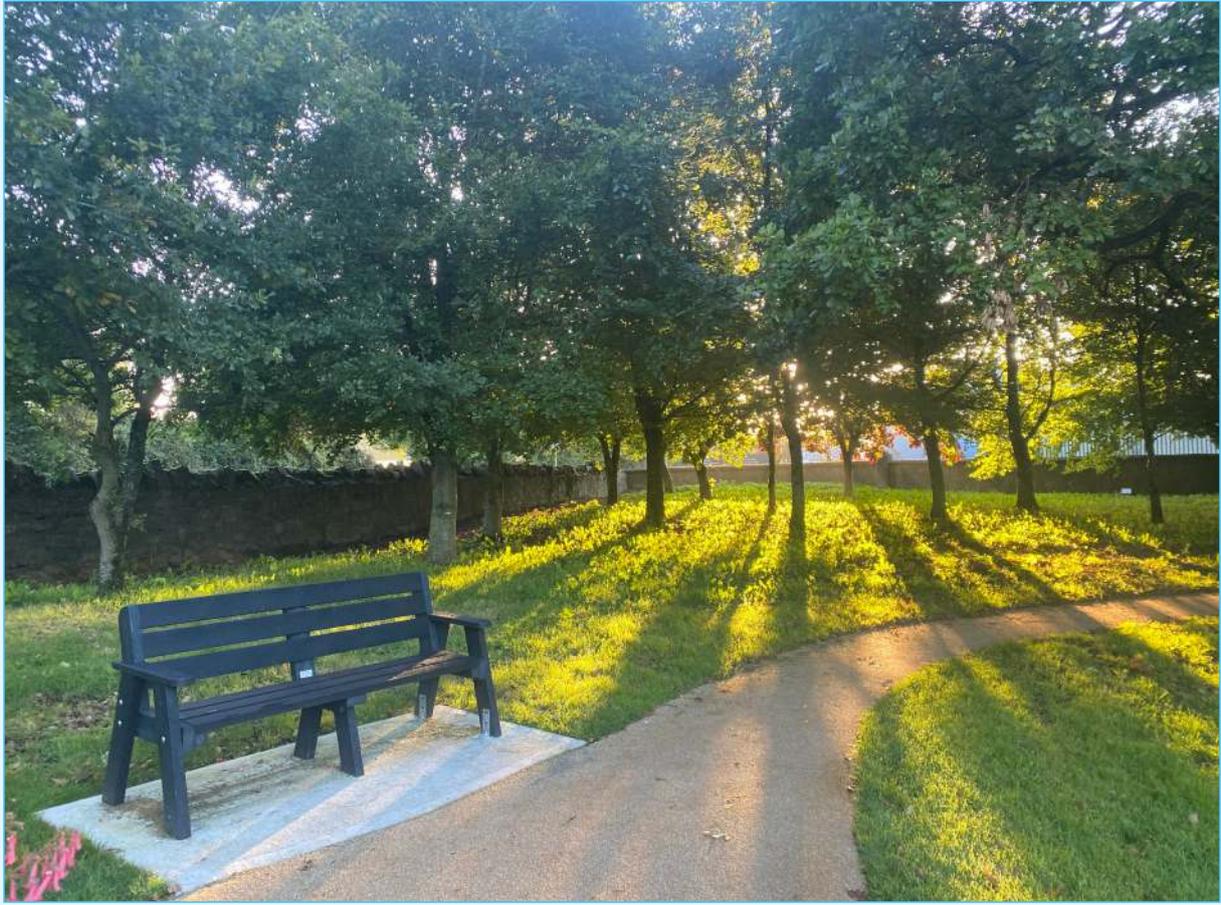
[www.gbhi.org/fiona-walsh](http://www.gbhi.org/fiona-walsh)



#### **Derek Whyte**

Derek Whyte has a primary degree in Civil Engineering from Dublin Institute of Technology and a Master's Degree in Spatial Planning. Derek attained a Diploma in Law from the Law Society of Ireland and is currently studying in the King's Inns for an Advanced Diploma in Planning and Environmental Law. He began his career in the local authority environment and became involved in planning. Derek developed an interest in Age Friendly Planning which resulted in the development of numerous age friendly town plans in Ireland. He is the author of the local authority supported publication "Being Age Friendly in the Public Realm". Whyte Planning Consultants was established in 2001 and specialists in Age Friendly Design including Age Friendly Town Planning and Walkability Audits.

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