

# Dementia-ready housing design criteria

for general needs housing



West  
Yorkshire  
Combined  
Authority

Tracy  
Brabin  
Mayor of  
West Yorkshire

# How we developed this document

[The West Yorkshire Dementia-Ready Housing Taskforce](#) developed this guide and criteria based on a literature review and in consultation with Dementia-Ready Housing Champions from the [West Yorkshire Housing Partnership](#).

Please find below a list of the resources that were used.

*Creating a Dementia Friendly Environment*, Guinness Partnership, 2017

*Creating Age-Friendly Developments*, Greater Manchester Housing Planning and Ageing Group, 2023

*Dementia Friendly Design Tool*, Kirklees Council and Dementia Services Development Centre, University of Stirling, 2021

*Dementia-Friendly Housing Guide*, Alzheimer's Society, 2020

*Designing for a Lifetime: Age Inclusive Home Checklist*, Designing Homes for Healthy Cognitive Ageing, 2022

*Designing for a Lifetime: Tips and Tricks for Creating a Home That Supports You*, Designing Homes for Healthy Cognitive Ageing, 2022

*Housing for people with dementia – are we ready?*, APPG Housing and Care for Older People, 2021

*Is your housing dementia friendly?* EHE Environmental Assessment Tool, The King's Fund and University of Worcester, 2020

West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2024  
In partnership with



**West Yorkshire  
Housing Partnership**

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*With thanks to D Carroll and M Rendell, Step Change Design Ltd  
for the credited images*

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# Foreword



One in two of us will be affected by dementia in our lifetime; either as a carer or by developing the condition ourselves. I want West Yorkshire to be ready for this. I am committed to making the lives of those with dementia symptoms as fulfilling as possible, and my Dementia-Ready Housing Taskforce was established because the home environment has such a significant role to play.

At the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, we've examined existing guidance on dementia-friendly design and worked with health and housing professionals to develop these simple but effective criteria. Implementing them will make a positive difference to quality of life, helping people to stay independent for longer. I'm delighted that members of the West Yorkshire Housing Partnership are working with us to take such innovative steps towards dementia-ready housing.

Even better, I am sure that these measures will also be helpful to those who do not live with dementia. I am looking forward to seeing the results: homes and neighbourhoods that help us lead healthier and happier lives, whoever we are.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Tracy Brabin'.

**Tracy Brabin**  
**Mayor of West Yorkshire**

# Introduction

The number of people living with dementia in the UK is expected to double between 2025 and 2050 to almost 2 million. This is a significant challenge for the NHS and is forecast to cost the UK economy £42bn in 2024, rising to £90bn in 2040<sup>1</sup>.

There is only enough specialist housing to accommodate 5% of the over-65 population<sup>2</sup>, so designing and adapting homes to be dementia-ready makes practical and economic sense. Most people want to stay at home as they age, and staying in a community which is familiar and comfortable is beneficial for health and wellbeing.

The West Yorkshire Dementia-Ready Housing Taskforce has developed this list of ten criteria which can be applied to **all housing categories, not just those intended for older people**, to build and score homes for dementia-readiness.

## What does ‘dementia-ready’ mean?

Everyone experiences dementia differently and the individual’s path to diagnosis can be lengthy. While waiting for a diagnosis or even before seeking one, some common aspects of housing design can lead to difficulties, such as isolation, confusion or a fall.

The ten dementia-ready criteria listed here create an environment that facilitates a more independent, healthy lifestyle and avoids an institutional appearance. If applied at the design stage, they are cost-effective and avoid the need for some adaptations which can be unattractive and stigmatising.

## How should the criteria be used?

This guide aims to support those working in the housing sector to deliver dementia-ready homes and communities through planning, design, development, refurbishment and maintenance processes. As well as applying the criteria to newbuild standards, it makes sense to consider them when making any changes to existing stock, particularly when carrying out large programmes of works, such as retrofitting energy efficiency measures. A warm home makes even more difference to those living with dementia, who are more vulnerable to cold temperatures, due to propensity for weight loss, problems managing clothing, and the likelihood of being awake at night.

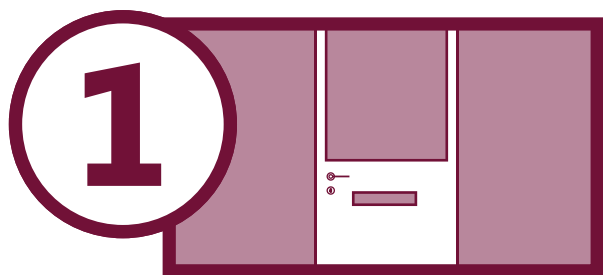
Factors such as location and topography mean that it won’t be possible to incorporate all the criteria in every home. But every additional point counts, helping someone to have a better quality of life.

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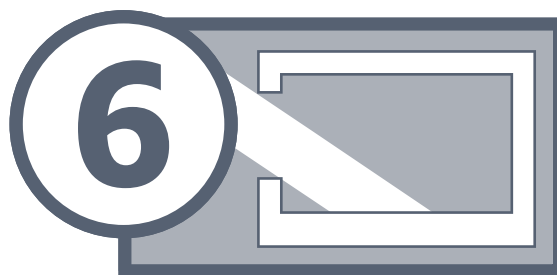
1 Alzheimer’s Society, 2024

2 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2012

# The ten criteria



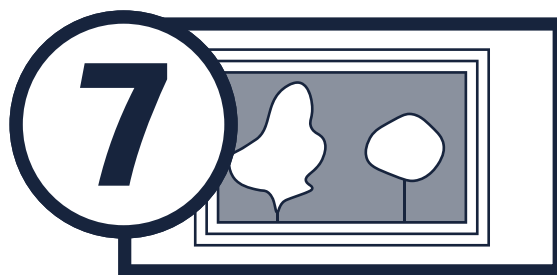
Front door is easy to find, day or night



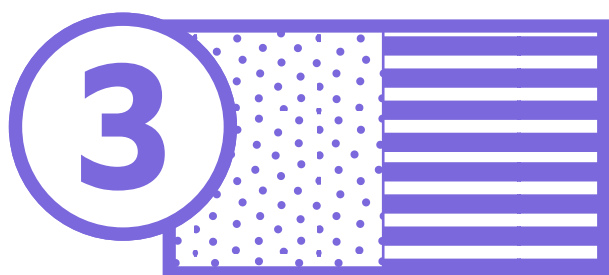
Good level of natural light in all habitable rooms



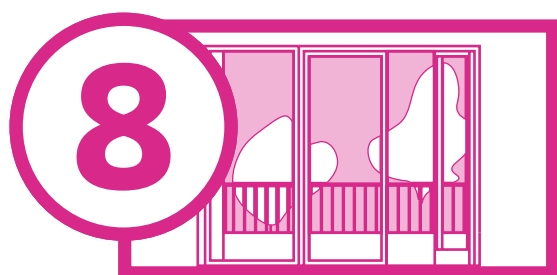
Step-free access into the home



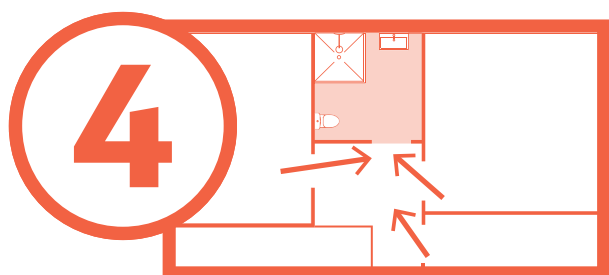
View of nature from at least one habitable room



Internal surfaces reduce confusion



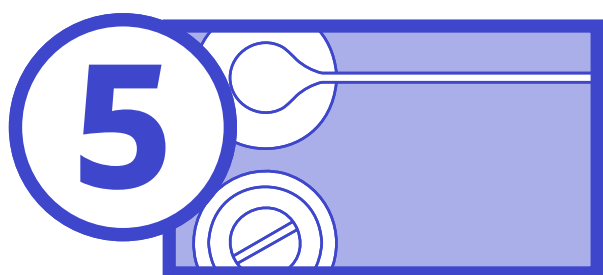
Access to an outdoor space that is easy to navigate



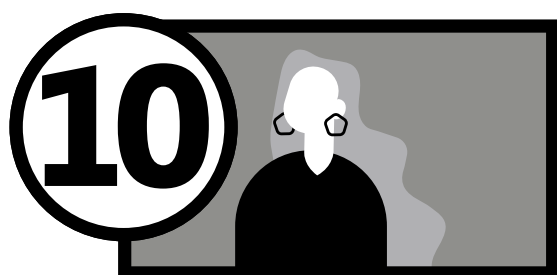
Bathroom is easy to find



Amenities and other homes within 1km



Bathroom/WC locks aid rescue



Active dementia champion within the housing organisation



# 1

## Front door is easy to find, day or night

The front door and/or the area around it are individualised, for example by using colour or adding other distinctive features such as wall-hung planters or unique number plaques. For apartments, wayfinding is made easier by ensuring that each storey's lobbies and corridors are unique and recognisable.

The areas outside doorways are well-lit, so that residents can find their keys, recognise visitors, and see different colours easily.

### Rationale

A personalised approach to the dwelling is welcoming and easier to find, promoting independence and exercise.



# 2

## Step-free access into the home

The front door has step-free access. For newbuild properties, there is step-free access to all external doors.

### Rationale

Falls are more common for people living with dementia. Being able to get outside more easily promotes activity and social connection, as well as a wider variety of sensory experiences.



While Building Regulations Part M requires the principal entrance to have an accessible threshold on all new build properties, it does not apply to other doors except under M4(2) – Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings.



# 3

## Internal surfaces reduce confusion

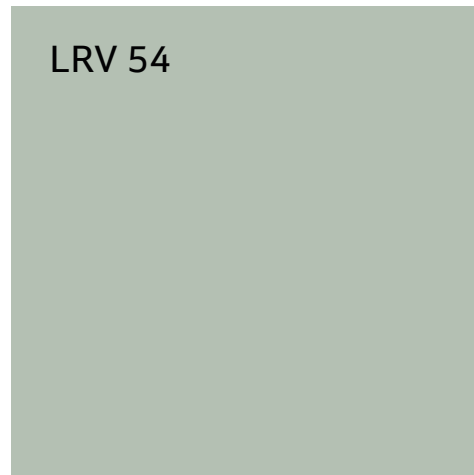
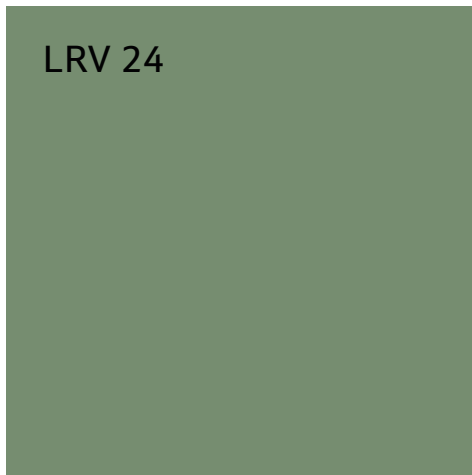
Strong patterns and very shiny surfaces are avoided on floors and walls. Floor coverings and mats do not contrast with the surrounding surface. Flecks or small patterns on flooring should be avoided.

### Rationale

Dementia can change perception. Bold patterns such as stripes and zigzags can be perceived as moving objects and highly contrasting floor tones may look like steps or holes, leading to confusion. Flecks on flooring can resemble dirt, which can lead to falls as people may try to pick them up. Shiny surfaces can cause glare and reflections.

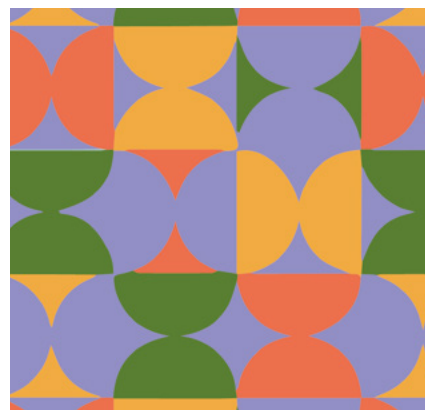


Differences in tone are measured using a Light Reflectance Value (LRV), which measures how much light is reflected from a surface. Black surfaces have an LRV of 0%, white ones 100%. A 30% LRV difference is recommended between floors and walls. Adjacent floor surfaces should minimise LRV difference (<10%), so that the two surface tones do not contrast.



An example of a 30% LRV difference

**What this *wouldn't* look like**



# 4

## Bathroom is easy to find

The door to the bathroom is visible from a bedroom door.

### Rationale

Being able to find the toilet easily, especially during the night, helps people to retain independence and dignity.



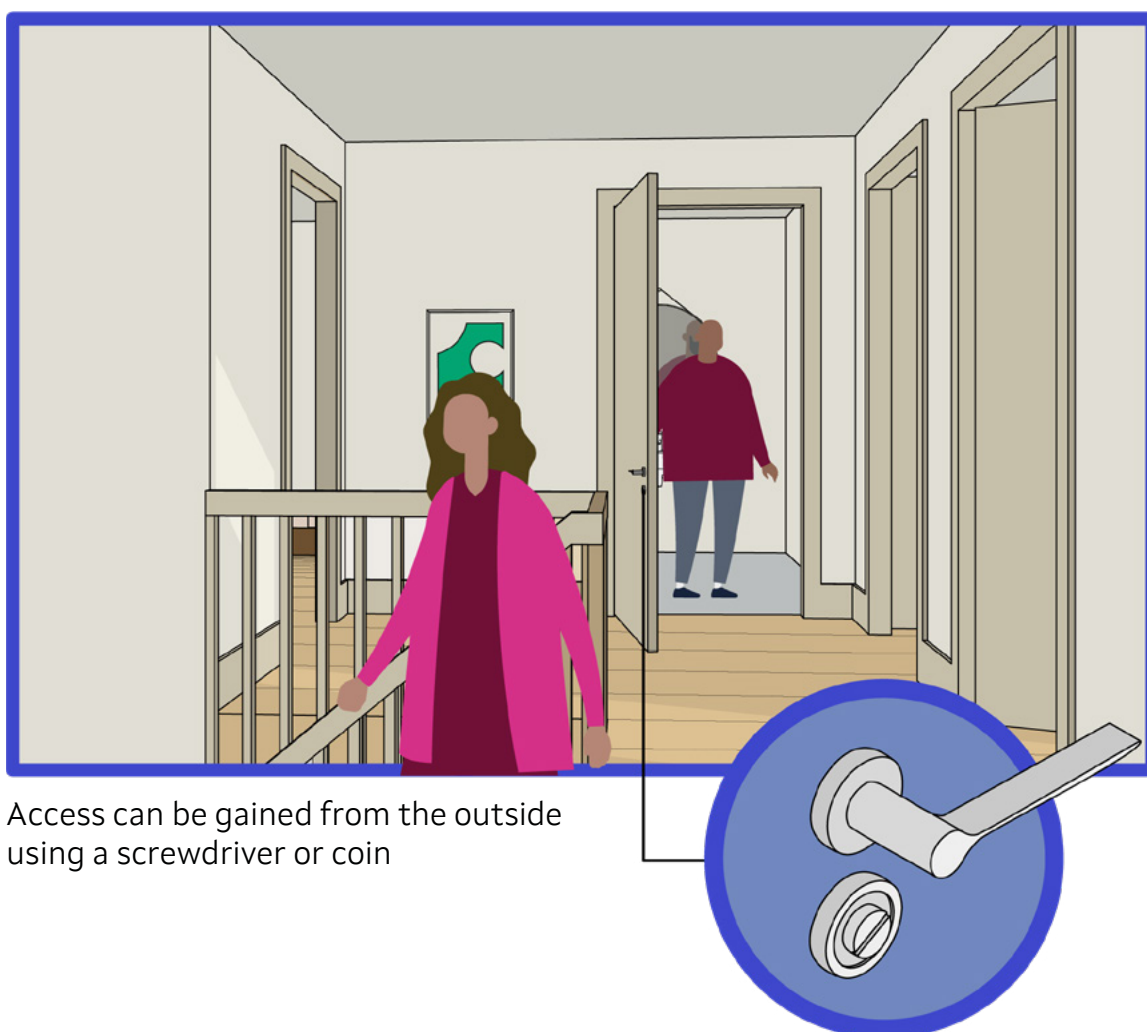
# 5

## Bathroom/WC locks aid rescue

The bathroom and WC doors can be unlocked from the outside in an emergency.

### Rationale

Falls in the bathroom and WC are common and being able to get help quickly is vital.



Access can be gained from the outside using a screwdriver or coin

# 6

## Good level of natural light in all habitable rooms

Pools of light and shadow are avoided. Artificial light is not needed during the daytime for working or reading most of the time. Habitable rooms are living, dining, kitchen and bedroom areas.

### Rationale

Exposure to natural light can assist in general wellbeing and in differentiating between day and night. It can also help to prevent falls.



A good level of natural light is represented by a Daylight Factor of 1% in bedrooms, 1.5% for living rooms, and 2% for kitchens. (See BS 8206-2:2008 Lighting for Building – Part 2 Code of Practice for Daylighting for more information).

What this *might* look like





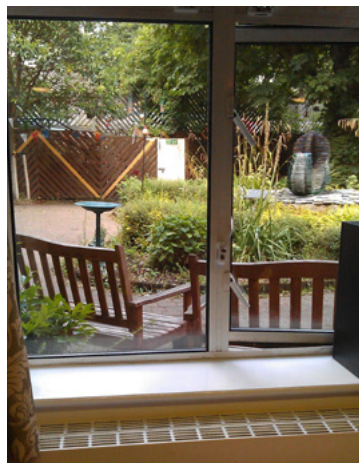
# 7

## View of nature from at least one habitable room

The view from the window includes more than one species of plant or tree. This view could be made more interesting with bird-feeders, and wildlife houses.

### Rationale

Connection with the natural environment stimulates memory and can slow down the progression of the symptoms of dementia.



*Image credit: Mark Rendell*

# 8

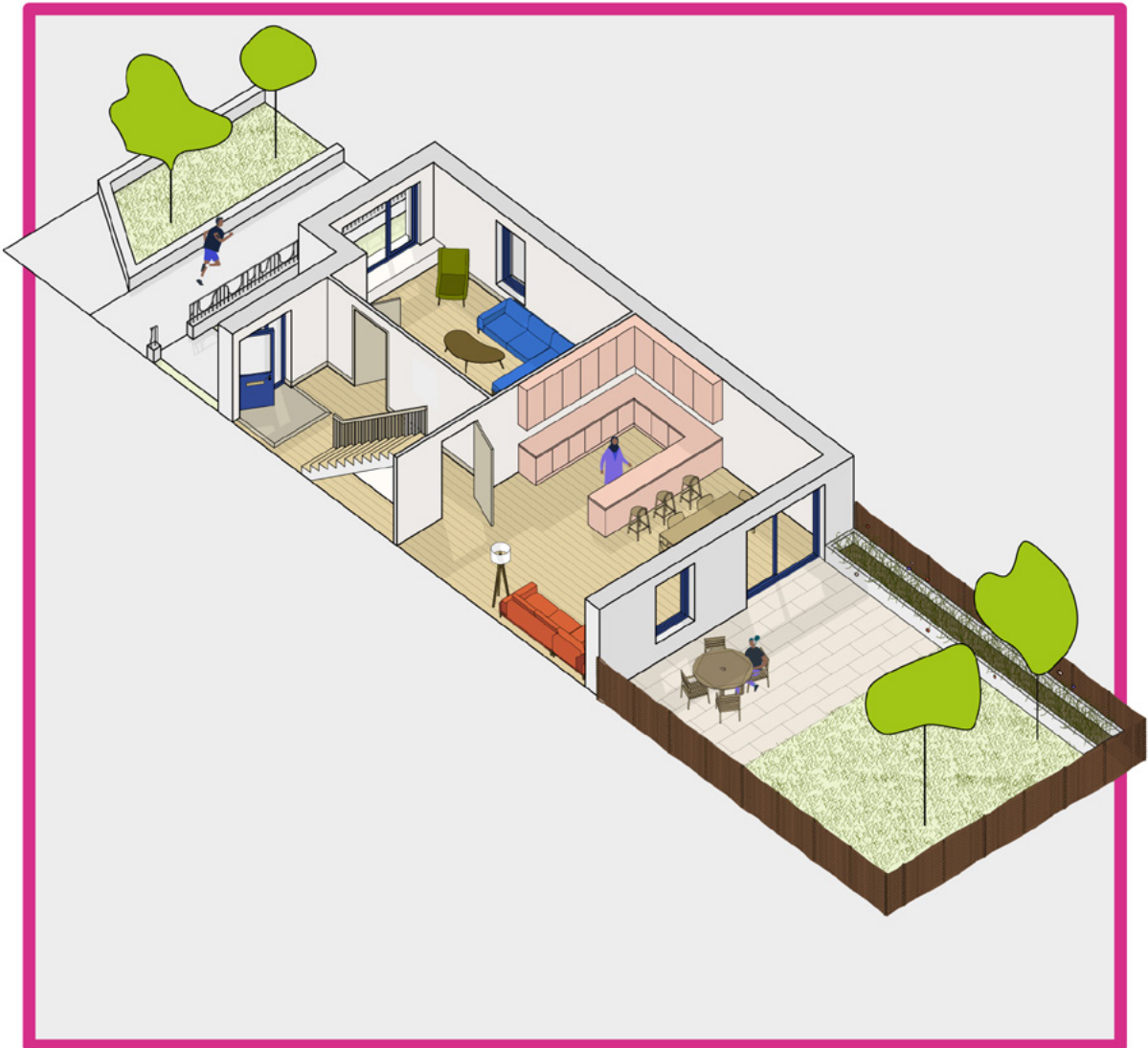
## Access to an outdoor space that is easy to navigate

There is a private or communal garden or balcony that is hazard-free, convenient to access and big enough for a table and two chairs. Slopes and steps are easy to see. There are no strongly contrasting tones in paving materials.

### Rationale

Outdoor activity helps the brain process and coordinate. It increases intake of Vitamin D and exposure to natural light, reinforcing circadian rhythms which affect sleep, alertness, and appetite.





Homes should have views of nature and access to outdoor space



*Image credit: Debbie Carroll*



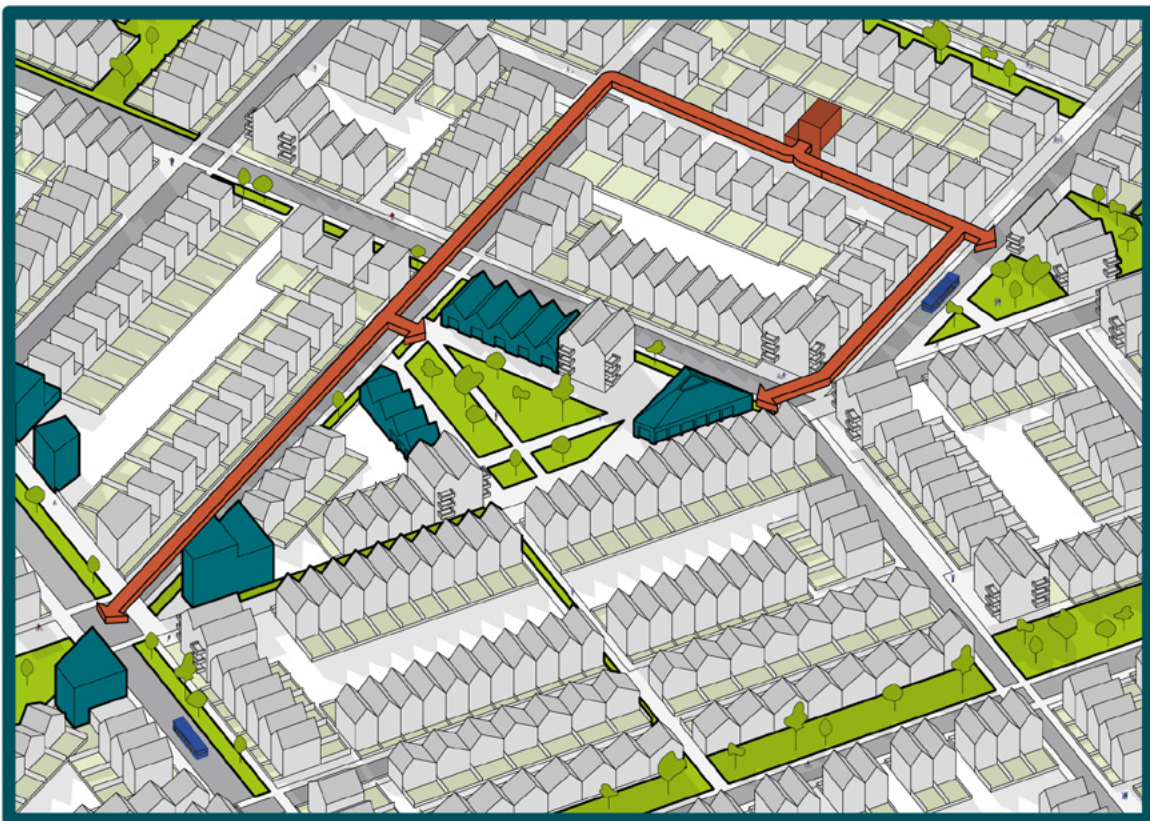
# 9

## Amenities and other homes within 1km

There is a range of shops, services and green spaces that are accessible comfortably and safely on foot, and there are neighbours close by.

### Rationale

People living with dementia are less likely to drive. Having amenities close by is important for independence and provides a destination, promoting activity.



A maximum 15-minute journey to reach amenities is appropriate for this criterion. The average walking speed for older adults is 1.1m/s but can drop to 0.6m/s for frailer people, which would equate to a 540m maximum distance for this group.

# 10

## Active dementia champion within the housing organisation

A Dementia-Ready Housing Champion's role is to promote awareness and understanding of dementia among their colleagues, residents, and wider community, and to improve the experience of those living with (or awaiting a diagnosis of) dementia, and their carers. Champions should make themselves aware of the local dementia pathway to enable them to provide the most appropriate information.

### Rationale

Although physical design plays an important role in making life easier and happier for those living with dementia, awareness and understanding of all those that come into contact with residents is crucial to ageing well. Housing organisations have an important role to play in building a dementia-friendly community.



# Additional design features

The ten criteria form the basis for dementia-ready housing design, but there are many more ways design can help people living with dementia. Options include those listed below. Please also see the useful guidance documents on page 2 for changes to the home that can be made if dementia is diagnosed.

- Glass fronted kitchen cabinets enable people to see what is inside without opening them
- Pelmet lighting under kitchen cabinets casts more light onto work surfaces
- A contrasting toilet seat assists recognition
- Level-access showers reduce the risk of falls
- A plug socket at the bottom of the stairs allows for easier future installation of a stairlift
- Bathroom/WC doors that open outwards or have lift-off hinges aid the rescue of someone who has fallen against the door
- Door handles should contrast with doors by a minimum of 15 LRV
- Layouts that allow for flexibility (for instance to allow privacy between resident and carer) are useful as needs change
- Fluorescent lighting can create added confusion. Having multiple light sources can help with managing quality of light; installing plenty of power sockets facilitates this
- An internal thumb-turn lock for external doors can be very useful, to avoid having to find keys or leaving them in the lock





**Find out more** [westyorks-ca.gov.uk/dementia-ready-housing-taskforce](https://westyorks-ca.gov.uk/dementia-ready-housing-taskforce)



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