# Design Principles and Challenges Checklist

This guidance document pulls out both the design principles for project development and a checklist of challenges from Ambition for Ageing's report in response to COVID-19, *Developing social contact models in a time of social distancing: a response to COVID-19*

- The **design principles** provide four areas of consideration when planning for social distanced projects to improve community connection.
- The **challenges checklist** provides a number of key issues that will need to be addressed for future projects.

This document is part of a larger report, *Developing social contact models in a time of social distancing: a response to COVID-19*. The full report contains:

- An overview of policy and some useful concepts
- A checklist of likely challenges
- A set of design principles that can help shape project development
- A series of case studies that can help outline practical approaches

These documents are available together and separately at
www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/socialcontact
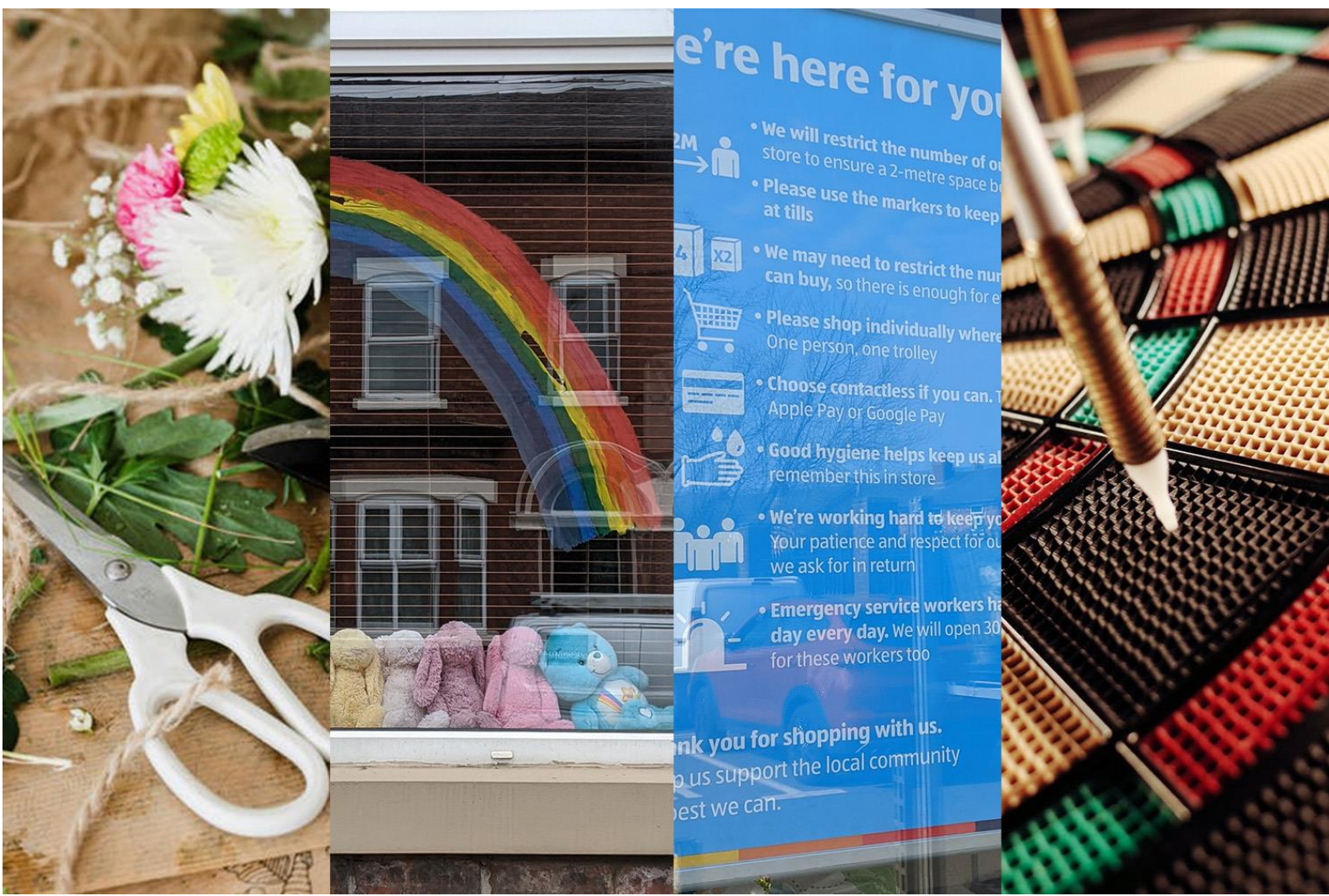
Challenges Checklist

Whilst reviewing the projects developed by Ambition for Ageing in the past we identified the following specific challenges These can help for a checklist of the key issues that will need to be addressed for future projects.

☑ **Social Distancing:** How can individuals taking part in activities and maintain a distance of two metres.

☑ **Leadership:** Are projects reliant on a small number of key leaders/volunteers who may be at risk of burnout?

☑ **IT:** Does the project recognise digital exclusion, cost of getting online, ability to troubleshoot and 'zoom fatigue'?

☑ **Shielding:** Does the project balance messaging between reassuring the concerned whilst encouraging positive social contact?

☑ **Enclosed spaces:** How will a project manage distancing and wider safety issues inside an enclosed space?

☑ **PPE & Hygiene:** Has the project or funder acknowledged the cost of PPE and factored regular cleaning into all activities?

☑ **Test & Trace:** Is there a plan to deal with temporary closure? Can the project support people and maintain confidence if participants have been asked to self-isolate?

☑ **Formality:** Informal activities will take on an air of formality given the circumstances so what steps have been made to help make people feel comfortable?

☑ **Travel:** With many uncomfortable with public transport how will the project reduce the need to travel?

☑ **Volunteering:** Many new volunteers and members of mutual aid groups are already returning to work – is the project sustainable if this trend develops further?

☑ **Engaging those outside of current social circles**: With social contact within households encouraged and connection between households severely limited how can the project build connections between strangers?

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Design principles

We have taken the approach of identifying four overarching key design principles to support the development and sustainment of social inclusion activities in the context of whatever comes next. These are:

Based on hobbies or shared interest

Builds Community Connection

Realistic Goal Setting

Getting the messaging right

Based on hobbies or shared interest

Many who are isolated will lack the confidence to engage in unfamiliar activities with unfamiliar people in unfamiliar places. Developing projects based around hobbies or shared interests, from crafting, gardening, reading or cooking to heritage, production of community media, quizzes or music, is important to provide a familiar and safe space through which to re-enter society. To develop projects people will engage with, it is important to:

- **Take a person-centred approach and understand what it is individuals like to do.** The more specific the better – many may like the idea of joining a book group but might have very different views of what sort of book they are willing to read. It is better to start with an understanding of what people want and then finding a way to meet it, rather than starting with an idea of what you want to deliver and finding an audience for it. This is the case even for ideas that have worked in other areas.

- **Help people find the familiar in each other.** People may view themselves as very different but have something in common that helps them find a connection. Understanding someone's individual history might help identify a point of connection. For example, people from very different backgrounds may have a memory of a local place that can be shared with others.

- **Link activities to places people know.** A place people feel comfortable in can reduce anxiety and concern that may occur when meeting new people or trying a new activity. If the location of the activity is going to be new to people, explore whether the activity can be promoted in a more familiar place. For example, local shopkeepers may be able to play a role in getting the message out to people in the community.

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Builds community connection

Being part of community life in the widest sense can be a great help. The need to feel connected to one's own community ranks highest in our findings on what older people feel makes their area age-friendly[i] and appears as one of the eight domains from the World Health Organisation on age-friendly communities. For those able to, just the ability to be out and about in the neighbourhood can reduce isolation. Previous Ambition for Ageing research showed the importance of shared spaces (social infrastructure) on the development and maintenance of social connections, and in particular on bridging social capital[ii].

- **Removing the barriers to accessing parks, shops or other shared spaces can help even if there is no direct connection with people made.** Projects which can add even a small social transaction to being out and about will have a greater impact.

- **Allow opportunities to be involved for those who cannot leave the house.** For those self-isolating it is important to help people feel that they are not invisible and that they are part of a greater whole. Help people submit ideas and make contributions – even if that is just by publishing a poem or picture on a noticeboard or website.

- **Keep people informed.** Providing people with information about their neighbourhood can help people feel connected to a place, even if they need to stay home most of the time. At the very least think about what can be done to help people feel someone is looking out for them and they are not invisible. This will help prepare the ground for a time when restrictions are eased. This can be through online information, phone calls and even traditional newsletters. The key is to help people understand what's going on locally so that they feel part of a community, even if they are at the edge of it.

Realistic goal setting

Do recognise that we may not be able to address all needs at this time, but that we can ease the situation people are in. Be honest with people about what can or cannot be achieved and look for solutions that at least make visible improvements, even if problems cannot be solved entirely.

- **The importance of a mixed package of delivery is key within setting realistic goals.** There will be many people who will continue to shield, even after government restrictions have lifted, many whom the trauma of the crisis will have pushed further into physical and social isolation, and others who are having to self-isolate due to having symptoms.

  It will be important moving forward, to provide a number of different ways for people to get involved. Even if we cannot include everyone in a group activity, there may be ways in which people can be involved separately while still feeling part of something.

- **This may involve the creation of hybrid-style events**, to include both those who are happy to attend in person and those who are unable to attend, but who may be able to involved in alternative ways, such as digitally or after the fact. Changes such as these, brought on by the COVID-19 crisis, will also increase accessibility more generally, enabling access to activities that may have previously been inaccessible to more marginalised groups, such as those who struggle to leave the house, or are uncomfortable in large groups of people but more comfortable in online spaces.

- **Keep in mind the impact of restrictions on the nature of activities.** For any social activity to be successful it needs to be fun, and if a more formal approach needs to be taken along with the use of PPE and regular cleaning this will make some activities too unattractive to succeed.

- **Be honest about what can be achieved.** It is important to ensure realistic goals for workers, volunteers and activists as well as participants in projects. Motivation will be lost if unachievable goals are set.

Getting the messaging right:

Communication and messaging lie at the heart of supporting people to get through this period with resilience and bounce back during the times ahead.

Communications must be clear, timely and relevant to be useful. However, we also have to recognise that Government messaging and guidance will always cut through loudest to the majority of people, and especially to those disconnected from their local communities (less bridging capital), as they are less likely to receive local messaging via local networks. There is a challenge to ensure that local messaging matches national messaging, whilst at the same time responding to local concerns and climate.

- **Language matters.** As noted earlier in this report, there is growing concern[iii] that the term 'social distancing' is detrimental. Recommendations from the World Health Organization[iv] and others are to use the more accurate term 'physical distancing'. Although discussing such semantics appears trivial, the messaging we use is important in ensuring social connection. Even simple messaging can have an impact on individuals' decisions. For example, individuals who require carers told us that they are choosing not to visit shops because they have read statements from supermarkets that only one person per household can visit. The lack of additional information provided with these messages, has created fear, when in reality, supermarket policies made exceptions for those with no other choice, such as people with carers and single parents.

- **The messaging we use should also be influenced by understanding how people perceive risk.** At its core, perceptions of risk are what is driving individuals' decisions during the pandemic and it is the messaging that shapes their view of risk. In a blog from the Behavioural Insights Team[v] in February, the author went into detail around how to encourage the right behaviours around pandemics. They pointed out that when people are concerned about a perceived threat, their ability to process information effectively can become severely impaired[vi] and that in some cases, less rather than more information leads to more accurate judgements[vii]. They recommended that communicating simple instructions that are easy to remember makes it more likely that people will follow them.

- **Messaging should be truthful but measured.** There is a trade-off between providing information for people to be able to prepare and not scaring them to the point at which they feel unable to do anything and therefore do not follow the guidance. A study carried out during the outbreak of COVID-19 in the USA[viii] showed that two factors had the most robust relationships with people's willingness to take steps to prepare: fear and hope. People who rated themselves as more prepared tended to be those who were more worried about the coronavirus as well as those who said they felt more hopeful. The study concluded that there is a need for an adequate level of fear as a motivator for the concern to be taken seriously, combined with enough hope to believe that reacting will make a difference.

- **Information provided needs to be specific about what actions need to be carried out, using clear and concise instructions in plain language describing what to do and why.** This needs to be embedded in a supporting narrative with honest descriptions of why it is important for guidance to be followed, alongside more hopeful messaging for the future.

References

[i] Building Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester; Thorley, J; 2018
[ii] Social Infrastructure: How shared spaces make communities work; Yarker, S; 2019
[iii] Social vs. Physical Distancing: Why It Matters; Banks, A; 2020
[iv] COVID-19: physical distancing; World Health Organization (WHO); 2020
[v] Covid-19: how do we encourage the right behaviours during an epidemic?; Merriam, S & Behrendt, H; 2020
[vi] Risk communication, the West Nile virus epidemic, and bioterrorism: responding to the communication challenges posed by the intentional or unintentional release of a pathogen in an urban setting; Covello, VT, Peters, RG, Wojtecki, J G & Hyde, RC; 2001
[vii] Heuristic Decision Making; Gigerenzer, G & Gaissmaier, W; 2011
[viii] Why Some People Prepare for COVID-19 and Some Don't; Felaman, DB; 2020

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Led by **Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation**

St Thomas Centre
Ardwick Green North
Manchester M12 6FZ
www.ambitionforageing.org.uk

📞 0161 277 1000
✉ ambition@gmcvo.org.uk
🐦 @afageing