1. **Introduction**

The idea for the dementia friendly garden in Springhead Park was initially proposed by a community organisation called Dementia Friendly Rothwell who run a *Tea Cosy Memory Café* once a month. The idea of the café is to provide a place where people with dementia and their families and friends can socialise and relax. Dementia Friendly Rothwell also do lots of work to educate local communities about how they can support people with dementia to provide a pleasant, safe and secure environment for them to live in. The next logical step for the group was to provide an outdoor space for people living with dementia and their families to visit and enjoy together, and this is where the idea of a ‘dementia friendly garden’ came from.

With the help of project partners Rothwell Live at Home Scheme and Leeds City Council, Dementia Friendly Rothwell identified an area of Springhead park that was suitable for the garden and a the garden was designed by a landscape architect.

2. **Background**

2.1 *Benefits of spending time in park:*

Evidence shows that access to the outdoors, especially in natural environments like parks and gardens, improves physical and mental health. As well as providing opportunities to exercise, it reduces symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress and increases feelings of well-being. This applies to people with all stages of dementia as well as those without.
Sunlight is important for production of serotonin, the mood enhancing hormone and the absorption of vitamin D which reduces the risk of various ailments. Exposure to sunlight can also reduce sleep disorders which can be an unpleasant symptom of dementia.

Studies have shown that walking three times a week for people with Alzheimer’s disease resulted in significant benefits in their ability to communicate and reduces the likelihood of slips, trips and falls. In addition, being in bright light has a modest benefit in improving the cognitive and non-cognitive symptoms of dementia.

2.2 Aims of the garden:

- To encourage and enable people with dementia to reap the many health benefits of spending time in a park.
- To provide a pleasant, safe outdoor space for people with dementia to socialise with friends and family.
- To provide a space for the Rothwell Tea Cosy Memory Café and Rothwell Live at Home scheme to hold outdoor events
- To help change attitudes to dementia and develop understanding of the condition to enable people with dementia in Rothwell to live a full and active life.
- To demonstrate the principles of a dementia-friendly garden to inspire families, care home managers and other local authorities to develop their own.
- To trial the benefits of having a dementia friendly garden in a public park – if it is works well, we hope to roll the project out across the city (subject to funding) and inspire councils across the country to follow our lead.

3. The plan

The garden was designed by a qualified landscape architect using guidance from experts in dementia-friendly spaces, Stirling University.

Key design features are as follows:

3.1 As a whole

- The garden is clearly defined and easy to navigate with obvious boundaries on all sides
There is a simple, free flowing loop around which to walk and enjoy the different features of the garden.

The area is large enough to be of interest and provide an opportunity to move around but small enough to feel and be safe.

3.2 Surface of paths

- Wide tarmac path (accessible for wheelchairs)
- Flat surface – no steps, ramps or inclines
- Smooth surface, no trip hazards.
- Well defined and easy to see (all one colour).

3.3 Signage at entrance:

- To welcome people to the garden
- To explain the features

3.4 Entrance

- Wide and accessible
- Has an attractive archway feature to welcome people in and make entry/exit point clear.

3.5 Walls

- Provide the area with a clear boundary
- Provide shelter on chillier days
- Are waist height so visitors can enjoy the view of the rest of the park from the garden

3.7 Hand rails

- To aid movement around the area
- Black colour contrasts with wall so it’s easy to see

3.8 Seating:

- Lots of seats with arm and back rests
- Varied seating including single chairs as well as benches so there are opportunities to sit alone as well with others.
- Bench design means they are easy for people to get in and out of

3.9 Planting:

- Planting aims to be really attractive, interesting and stimulating for the observer
- Includes plants such as bamboo and grasses that rustle in the breeze
- Includes plants with interesting smells e.g. thyme.
- Includes plants with interesting textures for touch e.g. lavender.
- No poisonous, irritating or prickly plants
- Warm colour scheme (yellow, red, orange) because evidence suggests those colours are easier to pick out by people with dementia than cooler colours like blue.
- Blocks of contrasting colour because they are easier for people with dementia to see.

3.1.1 Raised beds:
• Allow visitors to get close to the plants and really enjoy them, to view, smell and touch them

3.1.2 Notice board
• Replace the old, unattractive notice board with a new one with a Perspex cover for community notices relevant to the visitors of the garden e.g. Tea Cosy Café dates

3.1.3 Aviary:
• We have decided to keep the aviary that is currently at the site. This should provide additional interest and also attract other people, including children, who might be family and friends, to share the garden too.

4. Project partners
There has been a lot of interest and support for this dementia friendly public garden. The key partners in the project are:

• Dementia Friendly Rothwell and the Tea Cosy Memory Café
• Rothwell Live at Home Scheme
• Leeds City Council Parks and Countryside Service

5. Funders

We are very grateful to the many organisations and individuals who helped to fund the garden, in fact, so many people were involved that we don’t have space to name-check them all here and some wished to remain anonymous. However, we would like to thank the following organisations for their generous support:

• Rothwell in Bloom
• Leeds City Council, Housing Advisory Panel
• Leeds City Council, Community Committee
• Hadrian Healthcare
• Tescos
• Yorkshire Building Society
• Pilgrim Lodge Freemasons