

Access For All

**Gardens, Parks &
Community Spaces**



Developing an Accessible Garden, Park or Community Space

This information booklet is aimed at community groups who have an established garden, park or community space or are thinking of creating a new one.

Approximately 12% of the population has a disability of some form. The disability can range from temporary, (broken leg, injury) to permanent. A disability can also be acquired (Multiple Sclerosis, impaired vision, impaired hearing) and can occur at any life stage. A disability can also range in its severity and in how it effects a person's interaction with their environment. In addition, there are many people who need assistance with the environment around them including the elderly and parents with young children.

The booklet looks at ways you can either adapt your existing space or better plan a new space to help create a more accessible area that everyone can enjoy, as well as offering a few ideas on how biodiversity and recycling can be introduced into your garden, park or community space.

There are many different ways in which Wexford County Council may be able to assist you and if you have any questions about any aspect raised in this booklet, a list of contacts is included at the end.

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Key Considerations

Entrances

- Try to ensure the approach route is level and look out for other physical barriers.
- Disabled parking spaces should be located at entrances, where available.
- Use clear visual signs to direct people into the park.

Ground Levels

- Paths should be completely level or gently sloping.
- Avoid, where possible, steps and steep gradients.

Widths

- Entrances and pathways should be wide enough to allow for wheelchair access with a person alongside them and easy circulation around the site.
- Include turning circles at appropriate locations.

Walkways

- Ideally the park should have a circular walkway to allow access to the whole area.
- Do not place low obstacles along footpaths as these may create a trip hazard.
- Choice of edging along the side of paths can aid people who are visually impaired.

Seating

- Seating at various locations along a path allows places for rest.
- Leave space for a wheelchair user or child's pram to be placed adjacent to the seat.

Signage

- Use clear signage.
- Graphical signage can be better than written signage.
- Consider using Braille at appropriate locations.

Design Features

- All areas such as picnic benches, water features, information plaques and special design features should have a hard standing area or paths leading to them.
- Allow sufficient turning space.

Raised Bedding, Planters and Planting

- Consider raised planting so people can enjoy the feel and scent of foliage without the need to bend.
- Ensure footpaths are free from overhanging branches.

Please refer to the A3 map on page 9 of this booklet for helpful ideas and suggestions on how you might layout your garden, park or community open space

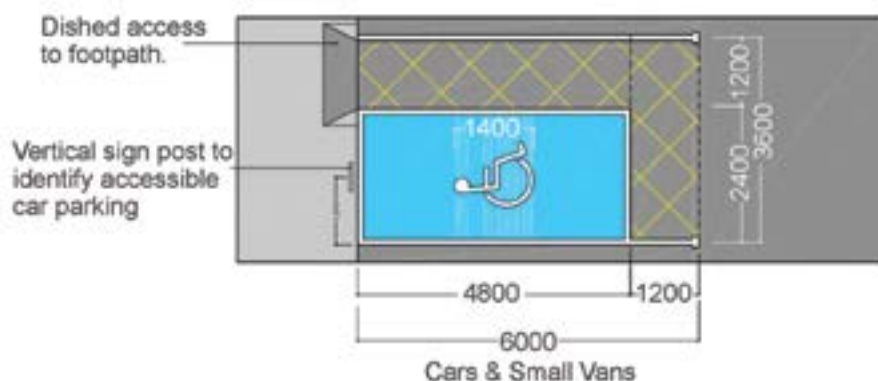


Entrances

If car parking is available to you, a designated accessible parking space should be located as close as possible to the entrance.

The approach routes from the parking space to the park entrance should be level or dished and have adequate lighting where available.

There should be sufficient space for people with limited mobility or using a wheelchair to leave and enter their vehicle and then walk or travel in a wheelchair to the main entrance of the garden, park or community space.



Clear markings and signage should be provided for people who are visually impaired to help them to identify the entrance to the park from the public footpath.

Tactile paving surfaces can be used to convey important information to visually impaired pedestrians about their environment, for example, hazard warning, directional guidance, or the presence of an amenity. Wexford County Council will be happy to advise you on the best solution for your garden, park or community open space.



Ground Levels

Ideally your park would be entirely level or with gentle slopes, free from steps and steep slopes.

Where you have existing steps consider building a ramp or gentle slope to allow wheelchair users to move unassisted to all levels of the park.

General standards for ramps and slopes are:

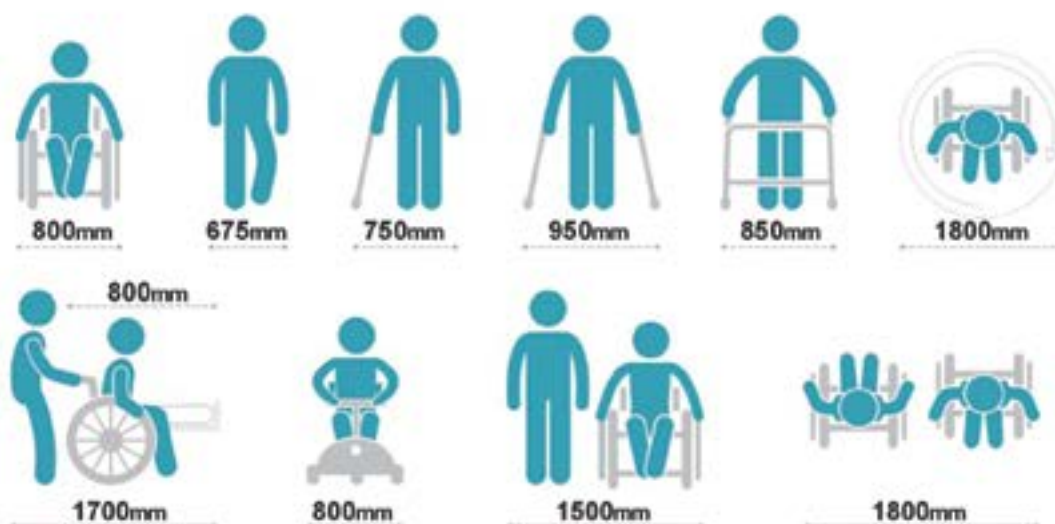
- Use the shallowest possible gradient for any sloped approach.
- A gradient of 1:20 is ideal with a maximum rise of 500mm and maximum total length of ramp not more than 10m.
- The ramp width should be 1500mm, and allow for a 1800 x 1800mm level landing at the top and bottom of the ramp.
- Use a non-slip surface and have sufficient drainage to prevent water pooling on the surface.
- Use a 150mm high edge protection along the length of the ramp.
- Provide a continuous handrail on both sides of the ramp at a height between 900mm–1000mm, extending 300mm beyond the ramp.

You may not be able to meet all of the above ramp standards. Wexford County Council will be happy to advise you on the best solution for your garden, park or community open space.



Walkways, Paths and Paving

Pathways should be wide enough to allow easy access and circulation for everyone including wheelchair users. Paths should ideally be 1800mm wide and at minimum should be 1200mm wide and have raised edges. Paths that are 1800 mm wide allow two wheelchair users to pass one another.



Accessible paths should be smooth, slip resistant with a matt finish. Jarring transitions between one surface material to another should be avoided. Concrete and asphalt are considered the most safe and easy surfaces for people to use.

Compacted crushed fines, granite, limestone and other crushed materials can be less expensive and provide a more natural looking surface, however, they can be more difficult for some people to walk on or for wheelchair users.



While less preferable, materials such as bricks, paving and stepping stones if installed properly, can also be used for footpaths. It is essential that good levels and minimal cracks are maintained, and the path has natural drainage.



Walkways within your park should ideally form a loop as this can have a calming effect for some people with intellectual or mental disabilities. Do not place low obstacles along the footpath as these can create a trip hazard. Avoid projections from walls as they cannot be detected with a walking stick, or be walked into and cause injury. Footpaths or walkways ending in a dead-end should have a turning circle with a minimum of 1800mm radius to allow people using mobility aids turn and travel back on the footpath or walkway.



The use and selection of different materials for paths and walkways can also aid in highlighting and indicating an area of special interest.

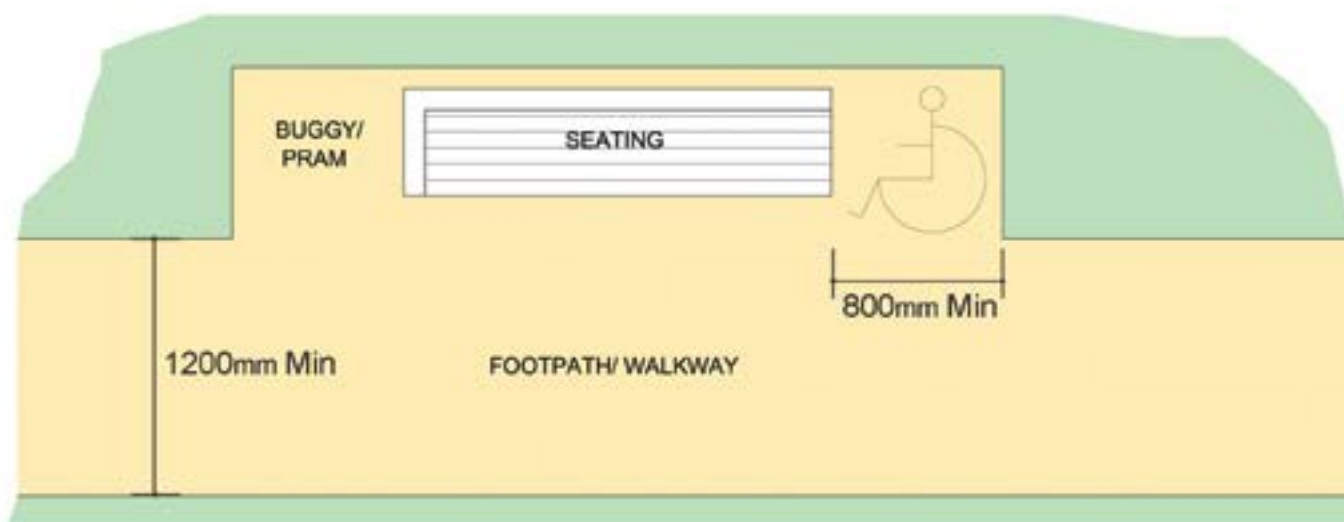
Edging along both sides of the path allows people who are visually impaired to navigate more easily around the park. This should be a maximum of 150 mm high and can be made of many different materials or planting.



Seating

Seating areas give people the opportunity to rest along the route and to relax and enjoy the park.

Seating should be located on a hard surface and designed for all weathers. Leave enough space to the side of the seating area to allow a wheelchair or child's pram to be placed adjacent to the seat and ensure the path in front is not blocked. Recessed seating areas are a good solution to avoiding blocking paths.



Consider different types of seating, for example, seats with arm rests or with back rests to people in and out of the chair and can offer comfort while resting.

Seating does not always have to be purchased. You can make a seating area from things you have within your park, for example using a tree stump or bricks.



Consider the location of seating in areas that offer shade or sunlight, and are close to special features so to enhance the users' experience of the park.



Signage

Signage offers users information about your park and can help them to navigate their way around. It can enhance their experience, by helping people to understand the space better.



When using signage some general rules are:

- Black on white or white on black provide maximum contrast.
- If using colours, tones are more important than colours as some people have difficulty differentiating between colours. Use very light tones against very dark tones.
- Sign lettering should use upper and lower case letters. Words in this format retain a shape for easy reading.

- Lettering such as plain-Sans Serif, Arial, Helvetica, Avant Garde and Sabon are ideal choices of typefaces.
- If using Braille, it should be positioned as near to the bottom left corner of the sign as possible.
- Try to communicate with graphics/pictorial signs.

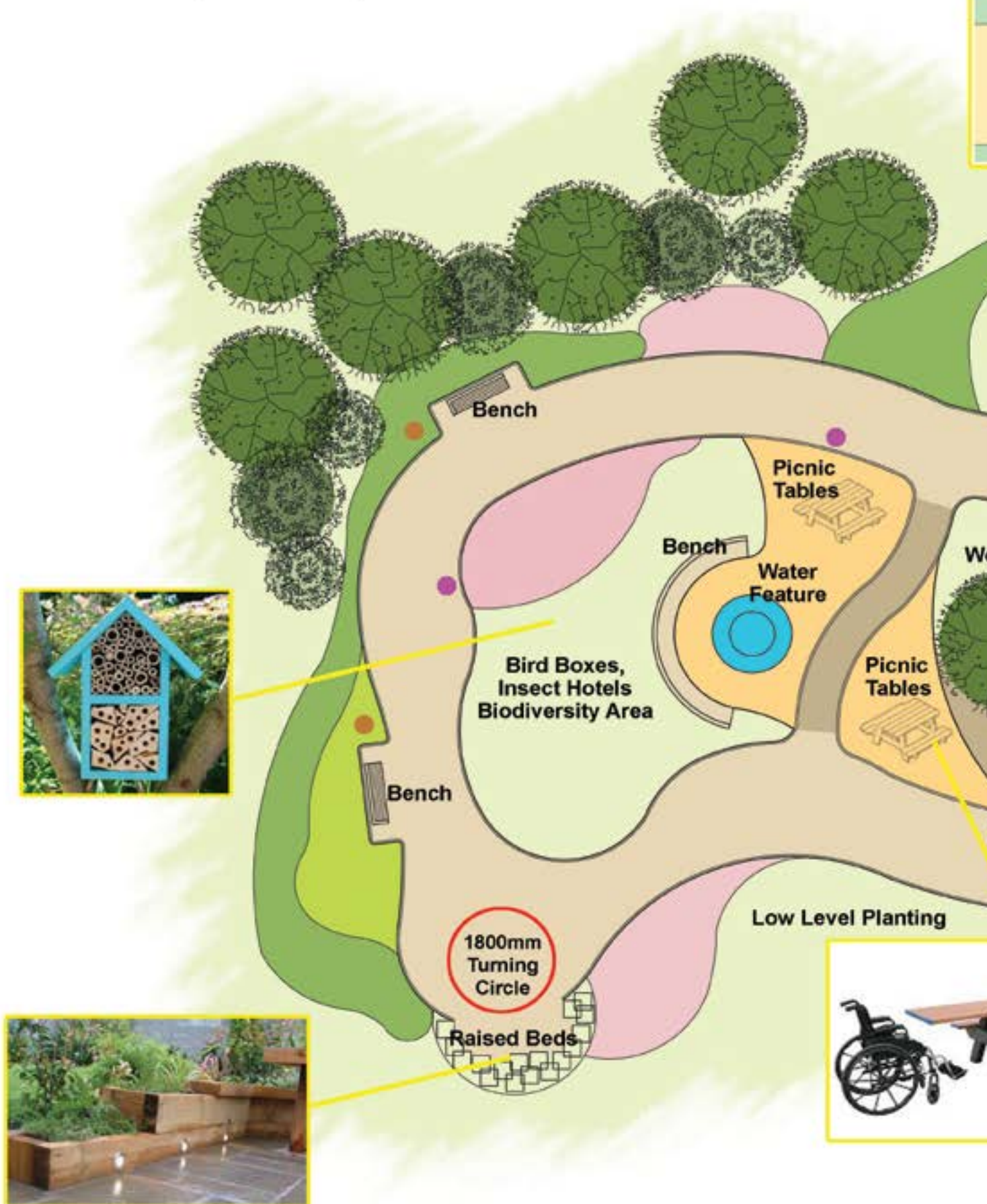


Design Features

Design features can enhance the experience of a garden for people with disabilities, for example, water features or wind chimes provide interesting sounds, they can benefit people whose other senses are limited. If you have a feature point in your park (for example a water feature, art installation, wishing tree, picnic table, bird table) you should ensure there is a path leading to it and that there is sufficient turning space and circulation around the feature. The feature should be on a hard surface area.



Example of Park layout





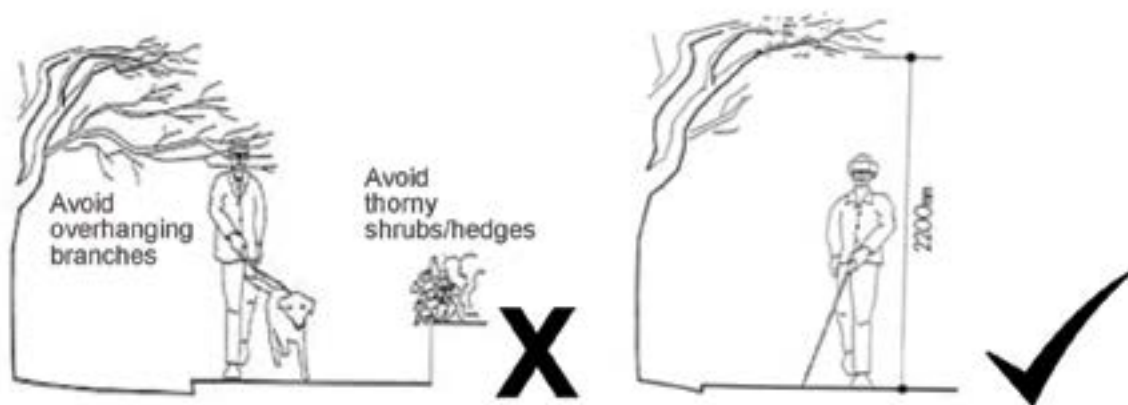


Raised Bedding, Planters and Planting

Consider the use of raised planting as this allows people to touch, smell and enjoy foliage without the need to bend.



Paths and walkways must be clear of low hanging branches.



When looking to introduce new planting, ideally native plant species should be used. They provide food and refuge for the local wildlife, birds and insects. Bees are an essential part of the pollination process, and many native flowers can increase their presence. Trees, both existing and newly planted, create shade, increase wildlife and visually enhance your park. Native trees should be favoured.



Other Things to Consider

- Sensory planting and features help stimulate the five senses of touch, smell, visual, hearing and taste (for example, scented and colourful plants, water features, wind chimes, tactile art installations, herb gardens).
- Consider the space for everyone including children, young people, people with dementia, children and adults with autism. A circular looped walkway can have a calming effect for some people. Fairy doors can stimulate the imagination of all ages.
- Consider types of planting that offer shade or wind breaks.
- Increase biodiversity. Install bird or bat boxes, use flowers that attract bees, create an insect hotel.
- Use of recycled materials.

Examples of using recycled materials in a garden:





Choosing Plants

Sensory planting can offer people the opportunity to enjoy your park in many different ways. Some plants that have sensory benefits are listed below. It is always better to use native species.

Non native species can be used as long as they are not invasive species. In addition to sensory benefits, many plants can also encourage a rich biodiversity to your park.

Native Species



Sight



Sound



Smell



Touch



Taste



Honey Suckle
(Táthfhéithleann)



Wild Strawberry
(Sú talún fhián)



Daisy
(Nóinín)



Field Scabious
(Cab an ghasáin)



Wild Oat
(Coirce fián)



Briza Media
(Féar gortach)



Common Reed
(Giolcach)



St Johns Wort
(Lus na Maighdine Muire)



Juniper
(Aiteal)



Fragrant Orchids
(Lus taghla)



Lambs Ear



Wood Sorrel
(Seamsóg)





Invasive Species

An invasive species is a non-native species whose introduction is likely to cause environmental harm to human, animal, or plant health. They have a tendency to spread out of control and compete against native plants and can potentially threaten some of our rarest flora and fauna.

Below is a list of invasive species. Some of these species may cause problems for your garden, park or open space. For further assistance and advice contact Wexford County Council (details at the back of booklet).

			
Montbretia	Winter Heliotrope	Buddleia	Rhododendron
			
Giant Hogweed	Japanese Knotweed	Old Man's Beard	Giant Rhubarb



Support from Wexford County Council

Wexford County Council will be happy to offer you advice and guidance in relation to any of the issues raised in this booklet.

Below is a list of contact details for relevant County Council Departments who you may need to talk to.

Access Section: Phone 053 9196387

- Advice on all aspects of accessibility
- Assessing Landscape/design plans and ideas

Community Section: Phone 053 9196000

- Amenity grants
- Playground Development Scheme
- Development of Sustainable Community Spaces

Environment Section: Phone 053 9196313

- Planting grants
- Trees for Wexford
- 'Keep Wexford Beautiful' Competition
- Tidy Towns
- Planting advice

Planning and Development: 053 9196101

- Biodiversity
- Invasive species
- Planning issues

Roads Department: 053 9196075

- Advice on disabled parking

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