



how accessible are Welsh railway stations?



The National Assembly for Wales's Equality of Opportunity Committee is undertaking an inquiry into the accessibility of railway stations in Wales.

The aim of the inquiry is to explore actions that the Welsh Government and other key organisations could take to improve the accessibility of stations.

To assist with its inquiry, the Committee is calling for evidence to be submitted from people who have experience or knowledge of any of the following issues;

Inaccessible platforms or other station areas;

Inaccessible facilities, such as toilets or information services;

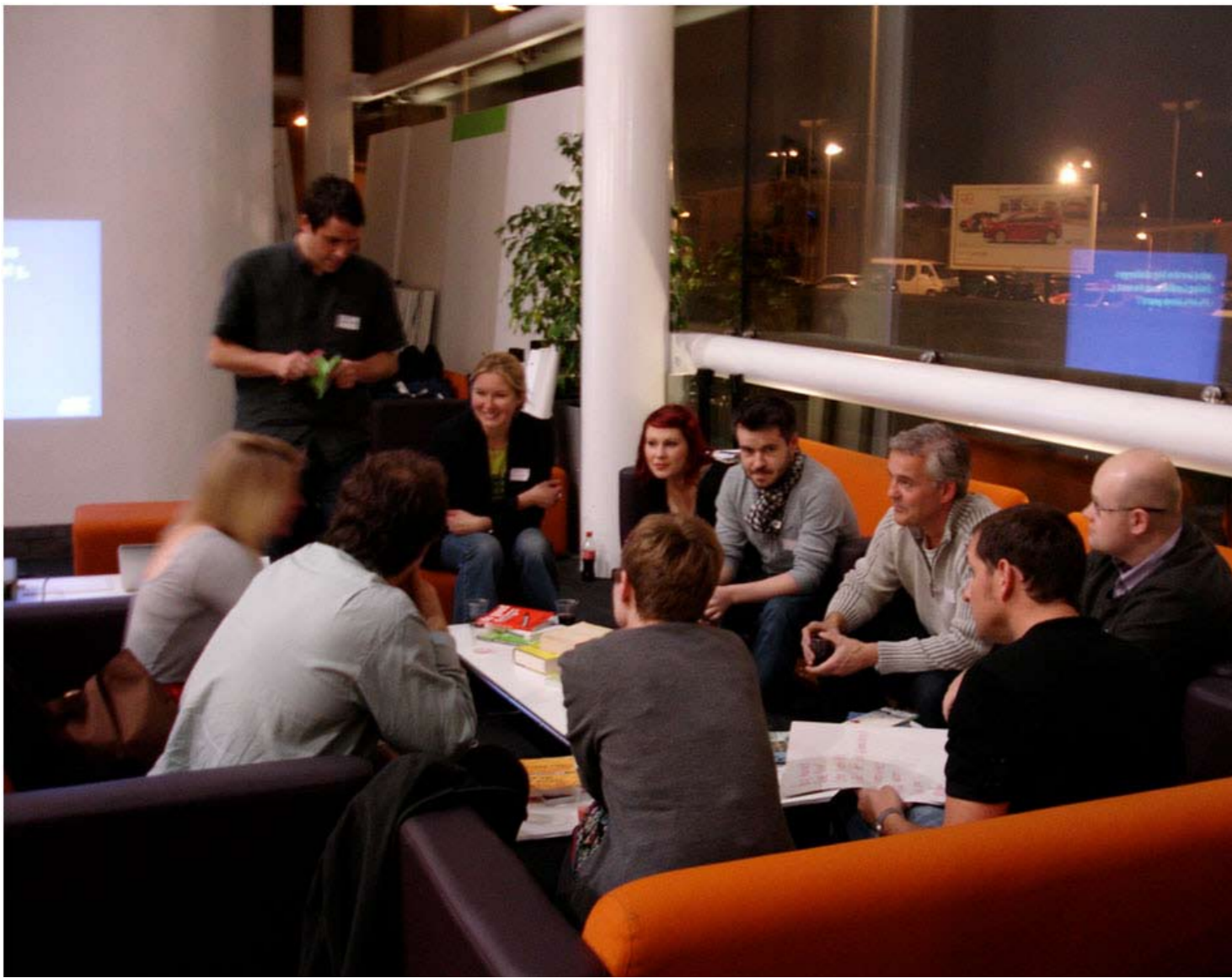
Problems in getting from the platform onto the train or vice versa;

Stations that are unstaffed or have limited staffing.

What assistance is available to help overcome accessibility difficulties?

Is this assistance well publicised/advertised and readily available?

What changes could be made that would improve accessibility at railway stations for you?



who are we?

ARK is an interdisciplinary group of creative thinkers and doers from the Cardiff area. We have a shared interest in using creativity and design to respond to and explore social issues in Wales. ARK meets regularly in Cardiff to discuss and debate social design issues and develop projects that allow us to respond to this dialogue.

ARK is an informal and non-profit organisation. We are currently exploring options for funding and commercial contracts that will allow us to work on higher impact

projects. We are also exploring opportunities for collaborating with other social, environmental and creative organisations across Wales.

In responding to this consultation, ARK can bring the collective insights and ideas from product designers, graphic designers, brand specialists, theatre designers and producers, photographers, environmentalists, fine artists and architects.

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our approach

ARK's response to the consultation question "How accessible are Welsh railway stations?" stems from an 'accessibility for all' approach. ARK firmly believes that it is in the best interest of those organisations involved in running Wales' railways to take the broadest possible view of accessibility in order to provide the best possible quality service for all.

We assume that most responses submitted to this consultation will centre around a traditional interpretation of the term

'Accessibility'; in that they will be interest-based in terms of access for disabled users whatever their disability – be it mobility, visibility or aurally-focused. ARKs proposed design-led response however is broad, and borne from our members' user experiences at the railways we use here in Wales.

We are not claiming any expertise on the issues that this consultation focuses upon, rather, ARK's interest is to relate issues of access as we have experienced them in an everyday sense with our non-specialised

needs. We wish to see an holistic approach to providing solutions to these issues, an approach that seeks to ensure the best possible experience for all, no matter what their needs or requirements may be.

Issues of equity aside, ARK also believes that our train operators should be pursuing this agenda now in order to build a service fit for the future.



widening access

Access to the rail network in a low-carbon Wales will be fundamental to national mobility, and as such we urge our rail operators to re-focus their accessibility work in this context. Arriva, WAG and all other partners are urged to incorporate mass mobility and accessibility solutions into all works undertaken from this point in time, and to view this as an exciting opportunity to make a significant contribution to ongoing efforts to build a more sustainable and equitable Wales.

ARK is of the opinion that an experience-based, user-centred

and non-expert approach to examining the issue will lead to an inclusive set of solutions to issues of access and national mobility, as opposed to the exclusive and piecemeal solutions that are currently offered and rolled out. The current approach to accessibility seems only to serve a minority of passengers at the lowest possible level, and does not address broader access issues. We wish to stress that this view of the current situation does not mean that past and current efforts to improve the passenger experience of disabled users is begrudged by us in any way

– indeed we view them as vital, and are simply urging a re-interpretation of the scope and depth of such work and thinking.

The current station-by-station focus on accessibility solutions precludes the opportunity to build a service of consistent quality in Wales, and it is consistency of provision that ultimately is key to ensuring accessibility.

role of design in accessibility

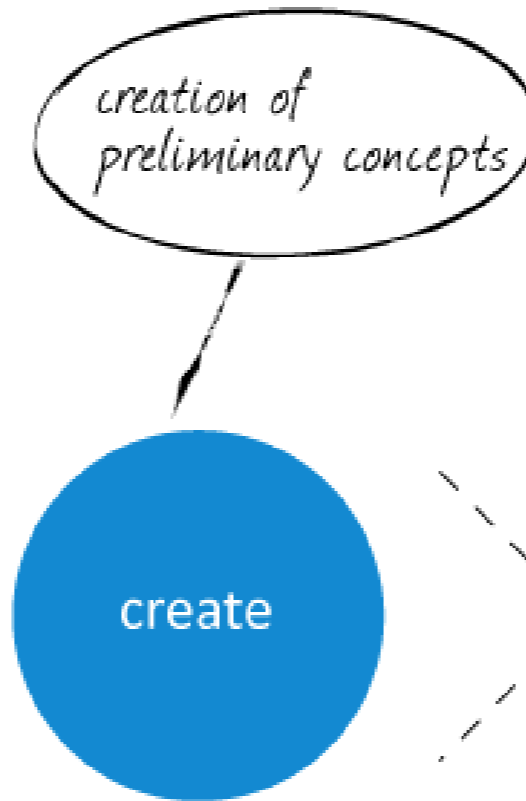
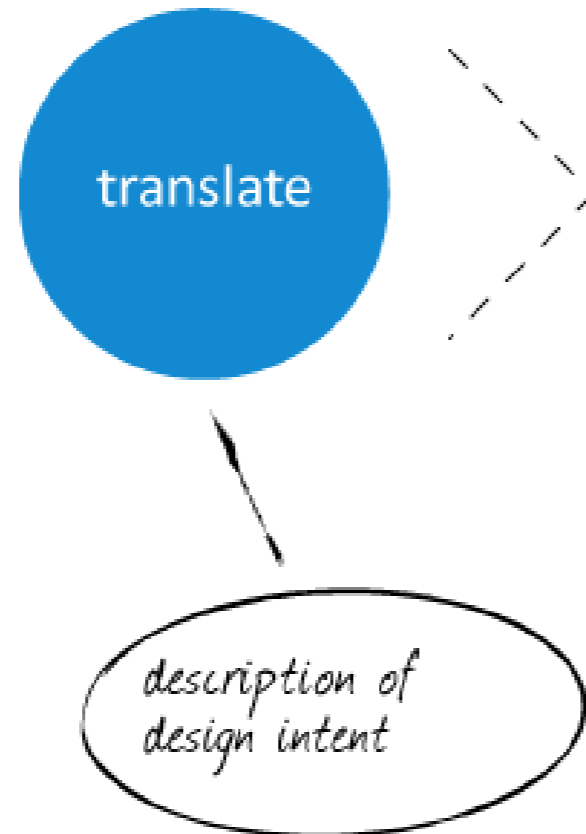
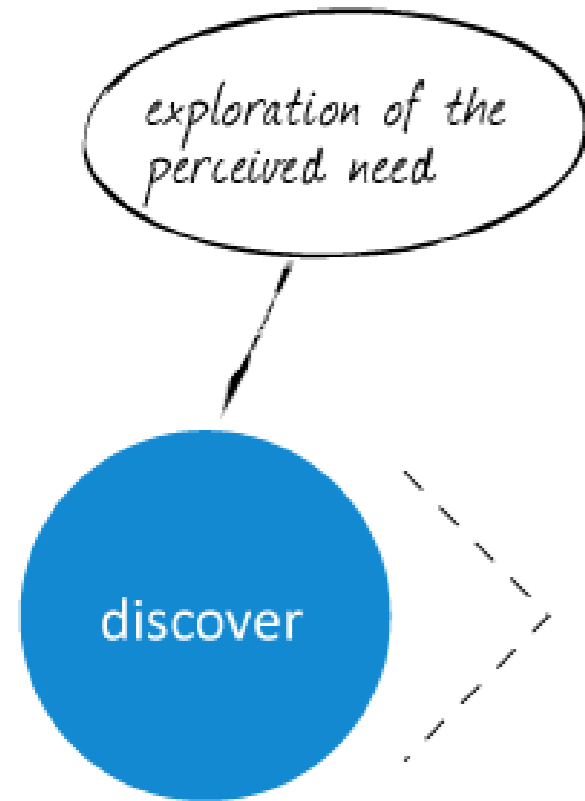
It is accepted that any public space, building, product or service should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it. There has been a shift away from thinking that accessibility should be treated as a separate design issue or an additional requirement to suit a minority of users. We are starting

to see an integration of accessibility considerations into everyday life through a more inclusive approach to the design of public spaces, buildings, products and services.

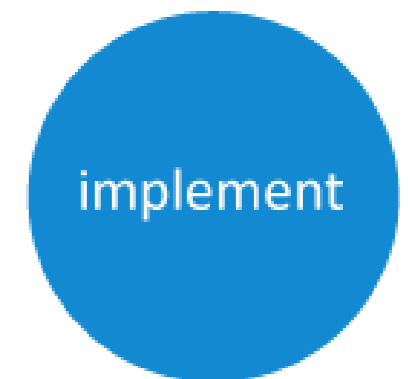
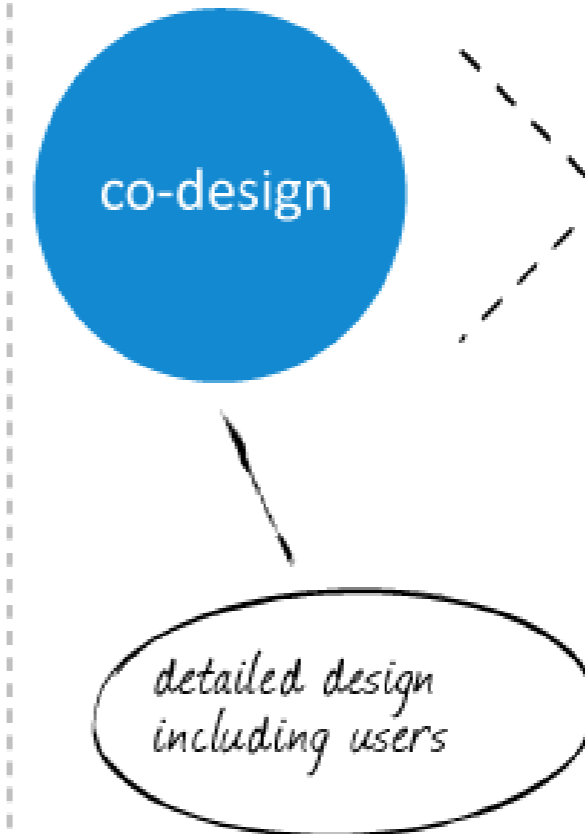
Accessibility should be considered from the outset of any design project regardless of age, size, gender, ability

or disability. If all accessibility is considered and integrated from the outset everyone benefits. This is not difficult or unusual. It is a principle of good design.

pre-consultation ▶



post-consultation ▶



process

ARK approached this consultation by using a range of design and creativity methods to help inform the inquiry, provide a potentially deeper insight to accessibility in and around train stations (for various users) and to propose actions to be taken by the WAG and other appropriate stakeholders.

Like most creativity tools, we used techniques to try and help our thought processes break away from existing solutions. Using

these approaches to capturing all ideas, even the unusual ones, helps to challenge inherent and initial assumptions, introduce new ways of thinking about the issues and to stimulate creativity.

Any product or service is designed and developed by starting response to a challenge or a perceived need. Transforming this perceived need into a solution that can successfully satisfy the real need requires an appropriate design process. A design

process generally incorporates a number of stages such as exploration, research, idea synthesis and concept development, detailed design and implementation.

For this consultation, ARK spent approximately 5 hours on the first three stages "discover", "translate" and "create". ARK would like to explore the final stages depending on the outcome and response to this report (and the wider consultation).

stage 1: discover (2 hours)

This stage is the systematic exploration of the perceived need, in this case accessibility of Welsh train stations. It was important to ensure the right design challenges were addressed, with due consideration of all stakeholders. This would lead to the first output, an understanding of the real need or needs.

We used a wide number of questions to help us discover what the issues of interest were to us as group.

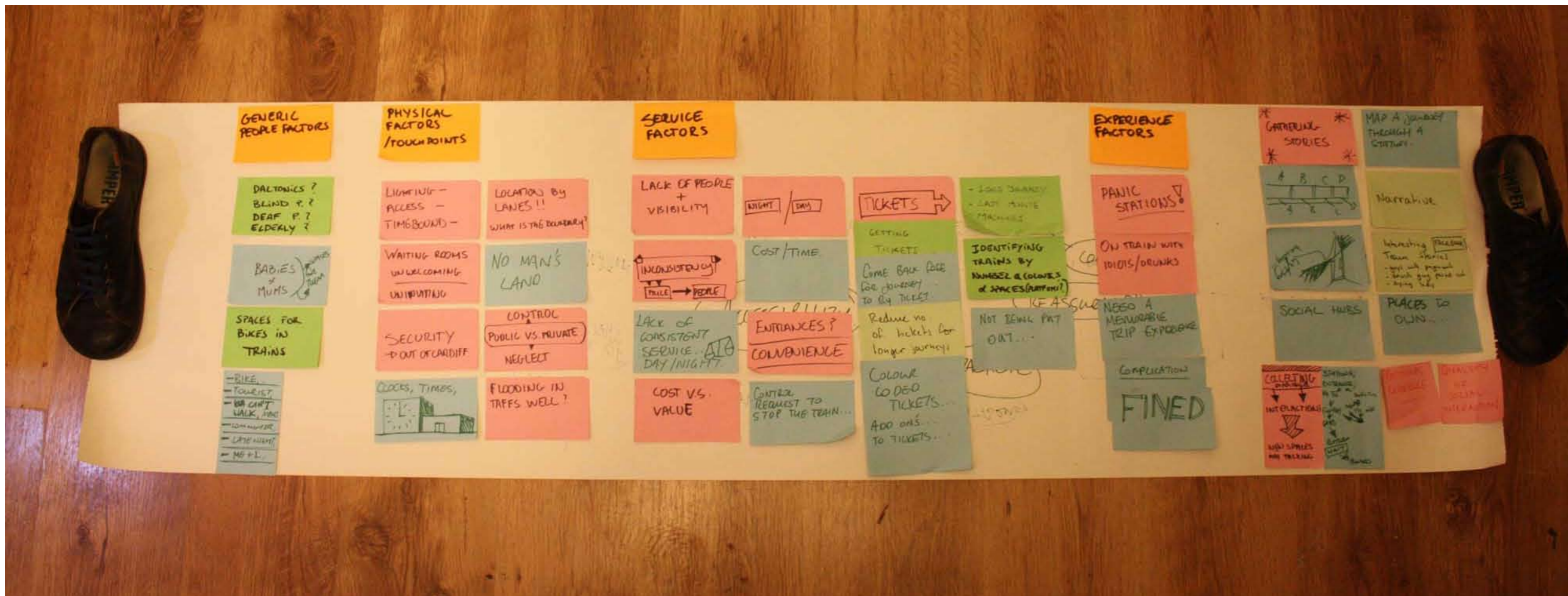
1. What are accessibility problems of Welsh train stations?
are they physical, cognitive, experiential, cultural, gender etc.?

2. What is the person/user profile?
are we considering young people, the elderly, everyone?

4. What are the main service touchpoints? (these can be physical, virtual or human)
what are the main user intentions/ actions?

5. What is the service journey? (How do people use and interact with the train service?)

6. How do we improve accessibility?
a. positive / negative brainstorming
b. co-design
c. service storyboards



key accessibility issues

Through stage 1 we were able to uncover what the key accessibility issues were, based on the experiences and insights from the group. At this stage it was important to take a user centred view on the accessibility issues raised.

Because of the limited time available, we explored various narratives and experiences people had on trains in Wales to allow us to build up user profiles. These user profiles allowed us to situate and explore the accessibility issues.

The initial analysis clustered these initial ideas under key headings.

People factors (user profiles)

- People with mobility impairment
- Visually impaired people
- Deaf people
- Elderly people
- People with colour-blindness
- Babies and mothers
- Cyclists
- Tourists
- Late night commuters

Physical factors

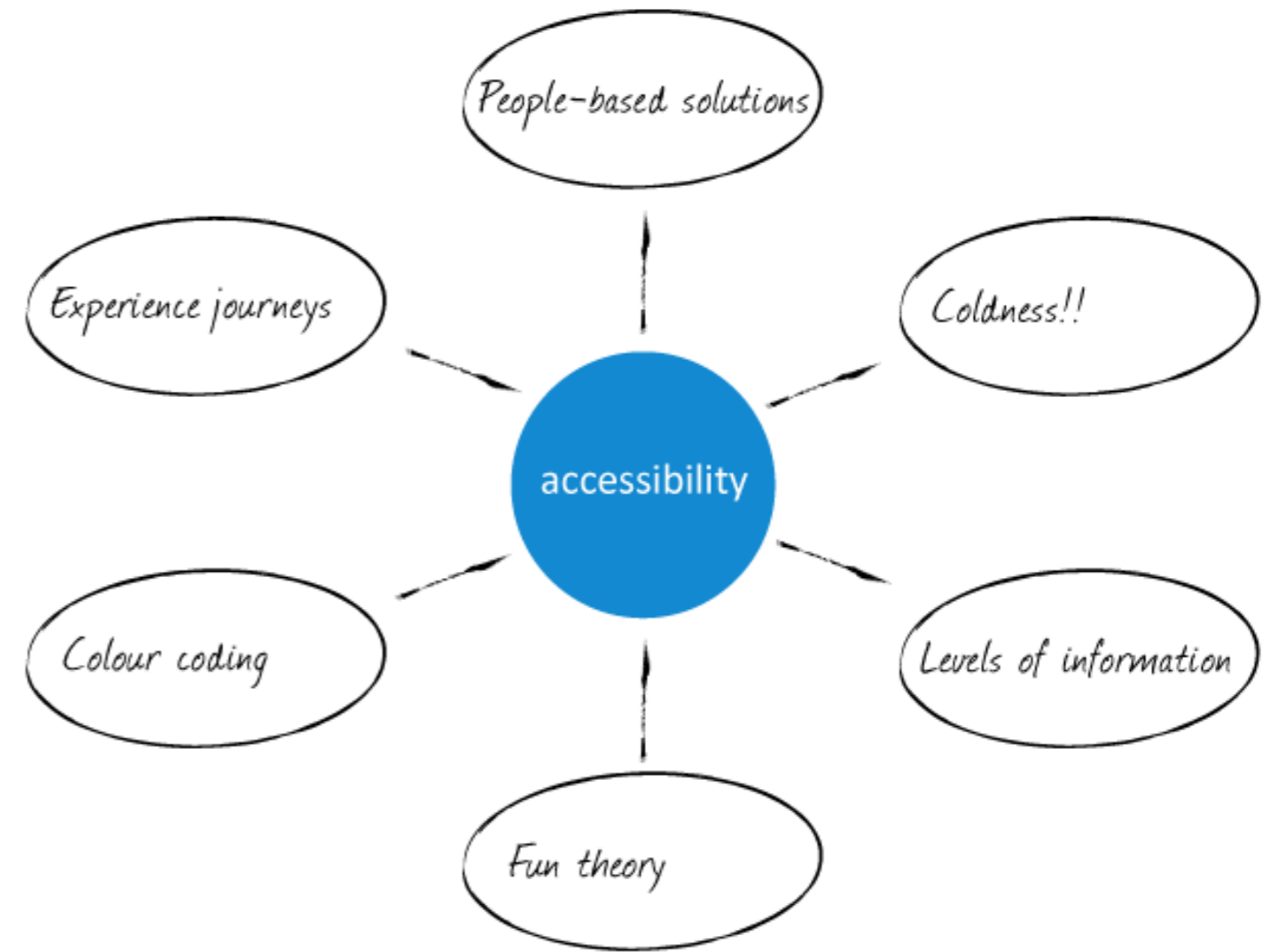
- Lighting
- Access (ramps/lifts)
- Waiting rooms – unwelcoming/uninviting
- Security – especially outside of main cities
- Clocks/Times
- Location – what is the boundary of the train station?
 - ‘No man’s Land’ - dead/derelict spaces
- Public versus Private ownership - control versus neglect
- Flooding

Service factors (how people interact with the train service)

- Poor staff presence and visibility
- Inconsistency of service, information and staff interaction
- Lack of consistent service – day and night, transfers and exchanges
- Cost versus value
- Night/ day and security
- Cost/time
- Entrances and exits – convenience
- Control – request to stop the train
- Tickets
- Identifying trains by number and colour and space (platform)

Experience factors

- Panic Stations!
- Quality of social interaction
- Fined!!!
- On train with drunks
- Memorable trip experience
- Complicated



stage 2: translate (2 hours)

This stage involved the conversion of the understanding of accessibility issues and other insights from stage 1 into categorised and well defined descriptions of possible design responses.

This stage is still dependant on divergent thinking and we tried to avoid proposing solutions.

We distilled down the various insights into 6 distinct "design intents".

Each of these would be used to create design concepts in Stage 3. These "design intents" were;

- "People based solutions" are non-technical solutions
- "Coldness!!" are any solutions that make stations more welcoming
- "Levels of information" are all solutions related to communication
- "Fun theory" relates to solutions addressing behaviour change
- "Colour coding" are all solutions related to the use of colour
- "Experience journeys" are all solutions that encourage people to use trains for more than commuting

ARK sought to avoid the primary technical aspects of accessibility and sought to highlight new and unexpected possibilities.

stage 3: create (1 hour)

This stage was concerned with taking the various "design intents" from stage 2 and producing initial concepts. These concepts provide preliminary solutions to the issues identified.

ARK approached this stage by running a 1 hour design challenge with a number of regular ARK attendees. This 1 hour design challenge involved a number of the people that were involved in stages 1 and 2.

Ideally before moving onto the next stages, concepts would be evaluated against specific requirements. These

stages could also be used to develop a more clear design brief.

Some of the responses and outputs from the 1 hour design challenge are included on the following pages.

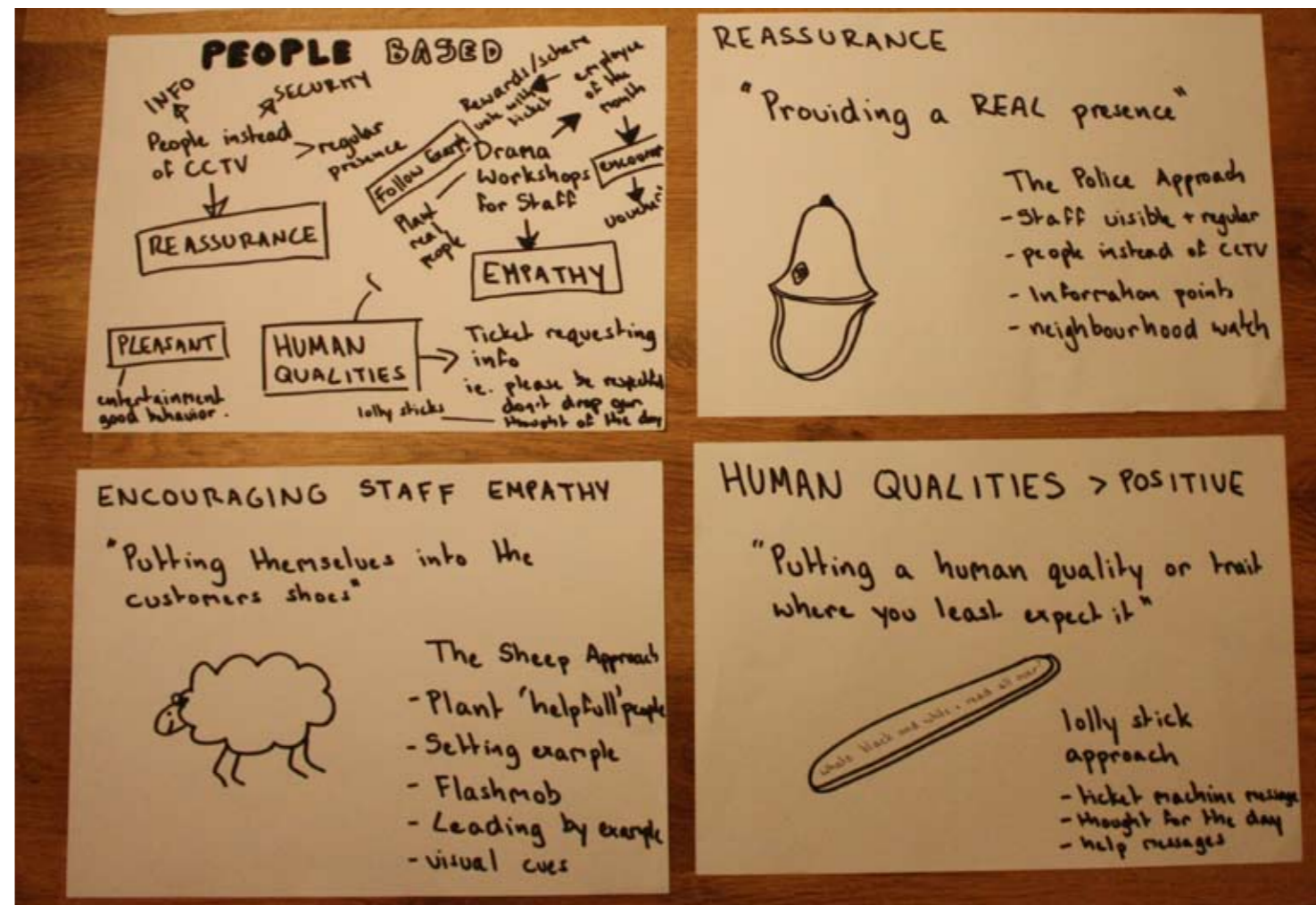
“People based solutions”

Many accessibility issues can, and should, be resolved by non-technical or structural solutions. This focus on social innovation would be an innovative approach for Wales and the wider UK.

Many of the solutions proposed through this stage included increased visibility and vitality of staff, adding a human dimension to train stations, improving staff training and involving commuters in the process of improving access to train stations.

This inclusion of commuters in the process could take the form of “neighbourhood watch” groups enabled to participate in improving the accessibility of their local stations.

This “people based approach” warrants further research and development as it will touch on a number of new approaches to innovation such as co-production, social design and trust-based networking.

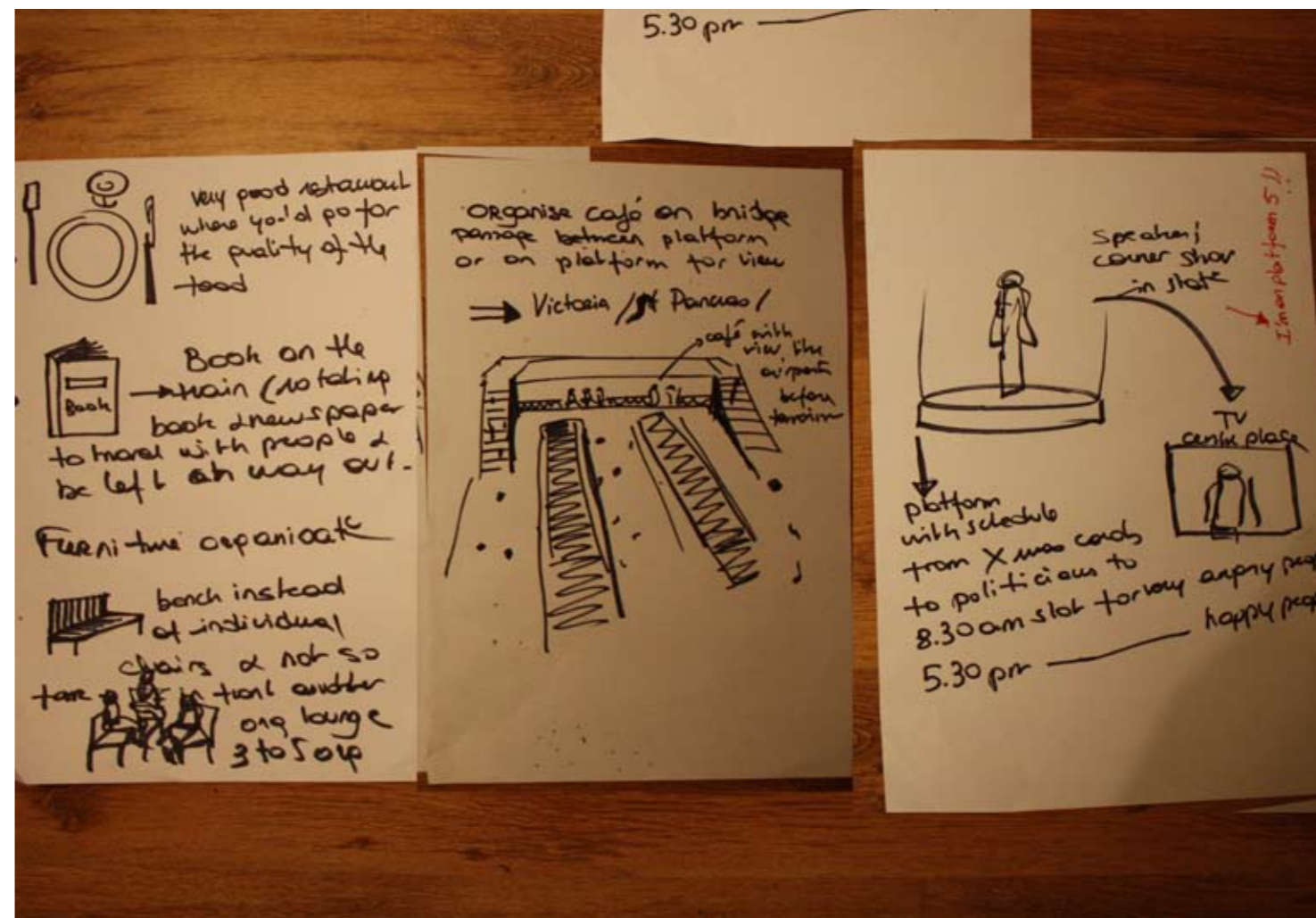


“Experience journeys”

Some of the key issues raised during the “discover” and “translate” stages included the need to increase the number of people using trains. This increase in use will improve the dynamics, sociability and financial sustainability of the stations.

It was suggested that the rail companies could start bringing people back to the trains for reasons other than commuting. Early suggestions towards this included the use of the rail system in Wales to provide new and exciting cultural experiences. These could include;

- trains and platforms as spaces for artistic performances and cultural experiences
- food routes – combined journeys across Wales to interesting food destinations e.g. Abergavenny/ Caerphilly
- platforms and rail bridges as spaces for food markets and high quality cafes

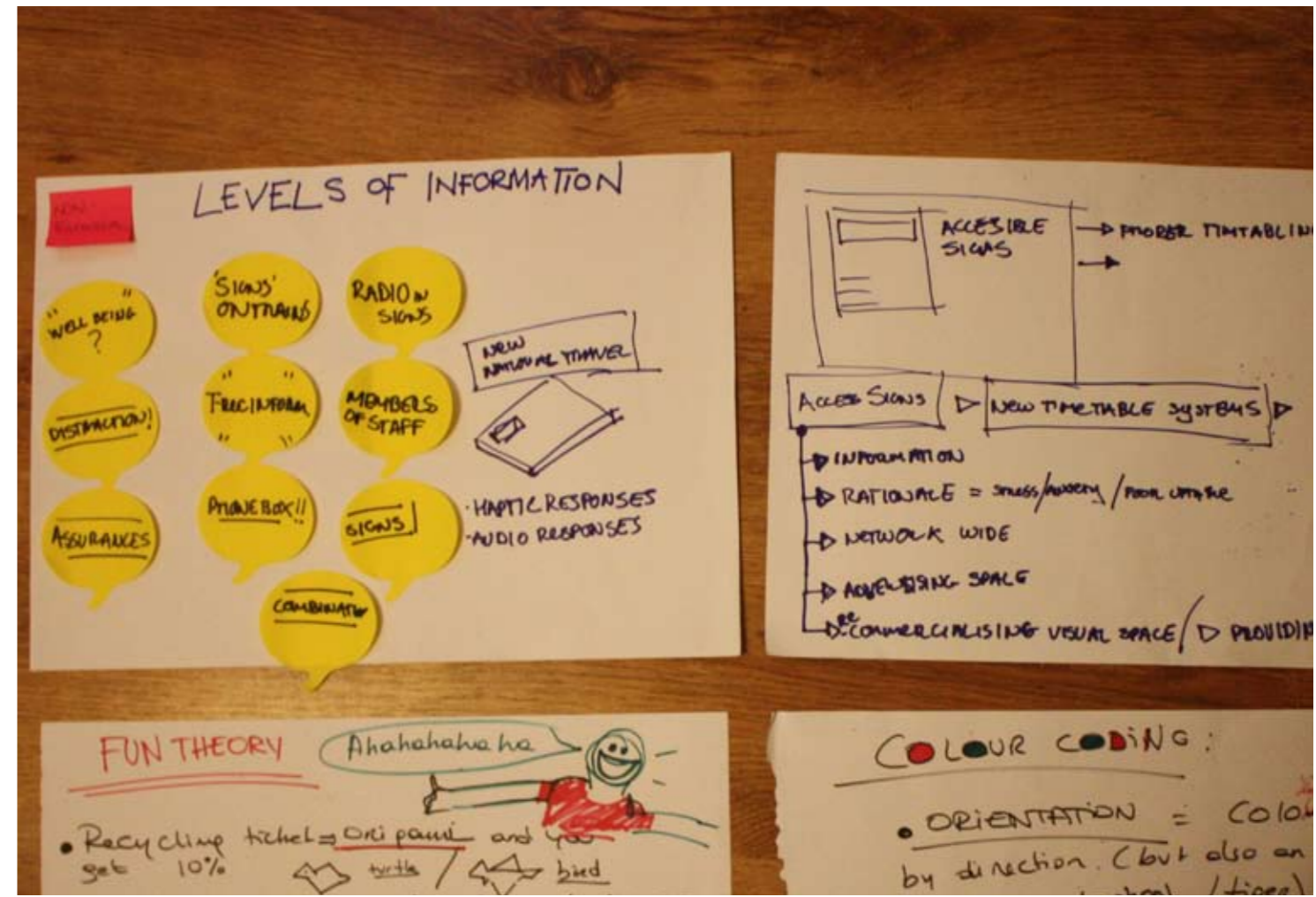


“Levels of information”

A significant and cross cutting issue is the role of information and how this affects accessibility. This can be information from a website, tickets, signs and posters on the platform to the information provided by the staff.

It was felt that in many cases the information system was deficient or fragmented and this impacted significantly on accessibility and usability. Some of the design responses to this included;

- a complete overhaul of the information system of the rail network (posters/tickets/timetabling)
- new system of advertising based on targeting specific users, for example through adverts on tickets, thus allowing for the removal of billboards from stations to improve visibility and opening of platform space
- a new digital national rail card that would make use of new technologies such as RFID (Radio Frequency Identification), augmented reality and close proximity Bluetooth information

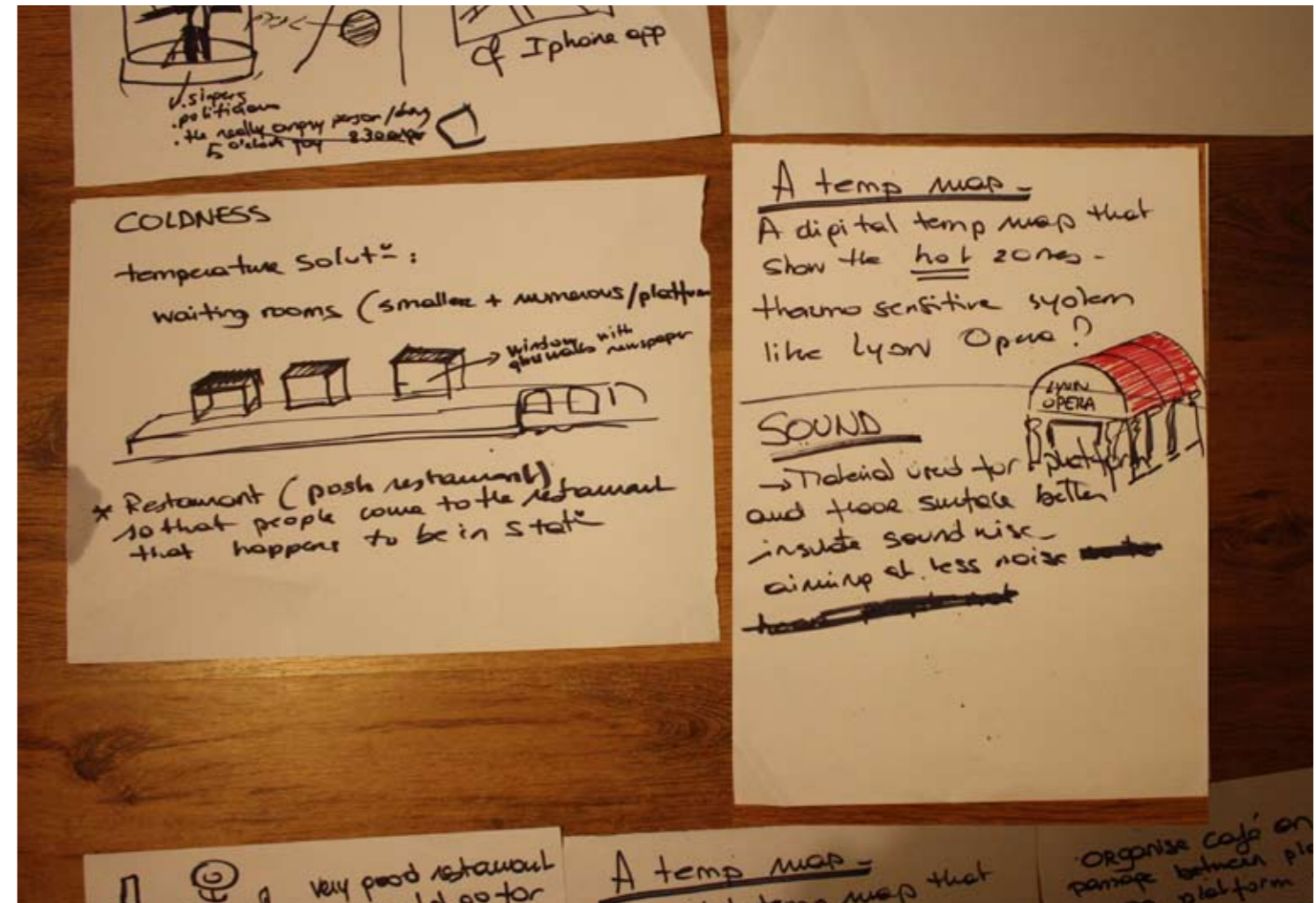


“Coldness”

Stations that are cold are uninviting reduce overall user experience and usability. Coldness is a multilayered issue as it can be a physical (metal seats, cold waiting rooms) and experiential (staff) responses.

It was suggested that “reducing coldness” would provide an interesting direction for the design response. Some of the solutions produced included;

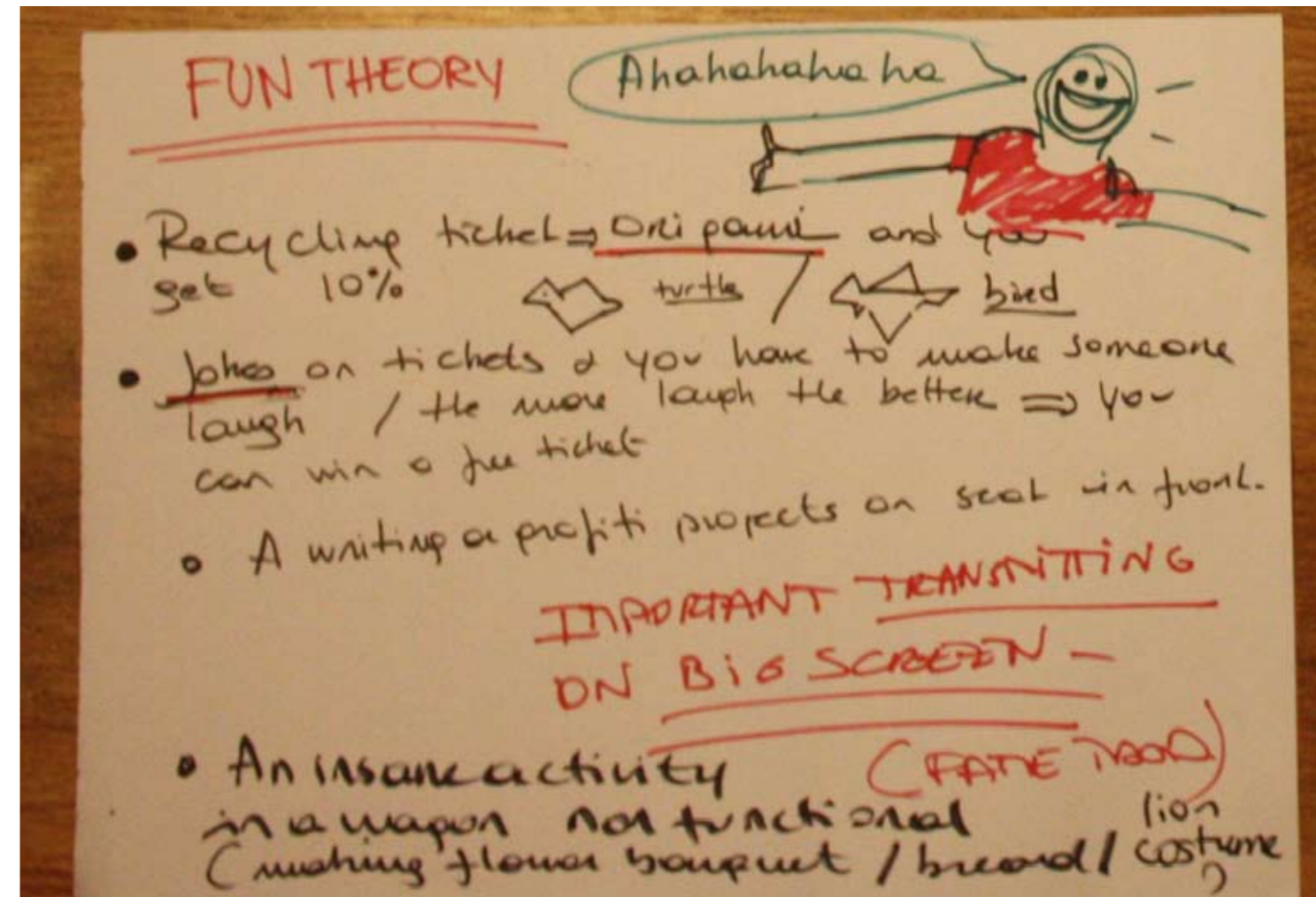
- reducing the size but increasing the number of waiting rooms
- using thermochromatic paints to convey a sense of warmth



“Fun Theory”

Fun theory is an interesting approach to behavior change which developed from an advertising campaign by Volkswagen. The premise of fun theory is that you can make people change their behaviour by making something mundane more fun.

One of the applications of “Fun Theory” was the conversion of a staircase in a Stockholm subway station into working piano keys—a way to convince commuters to take the stairs over the escalator. This was aimed at improving the health and fitness of commuters.



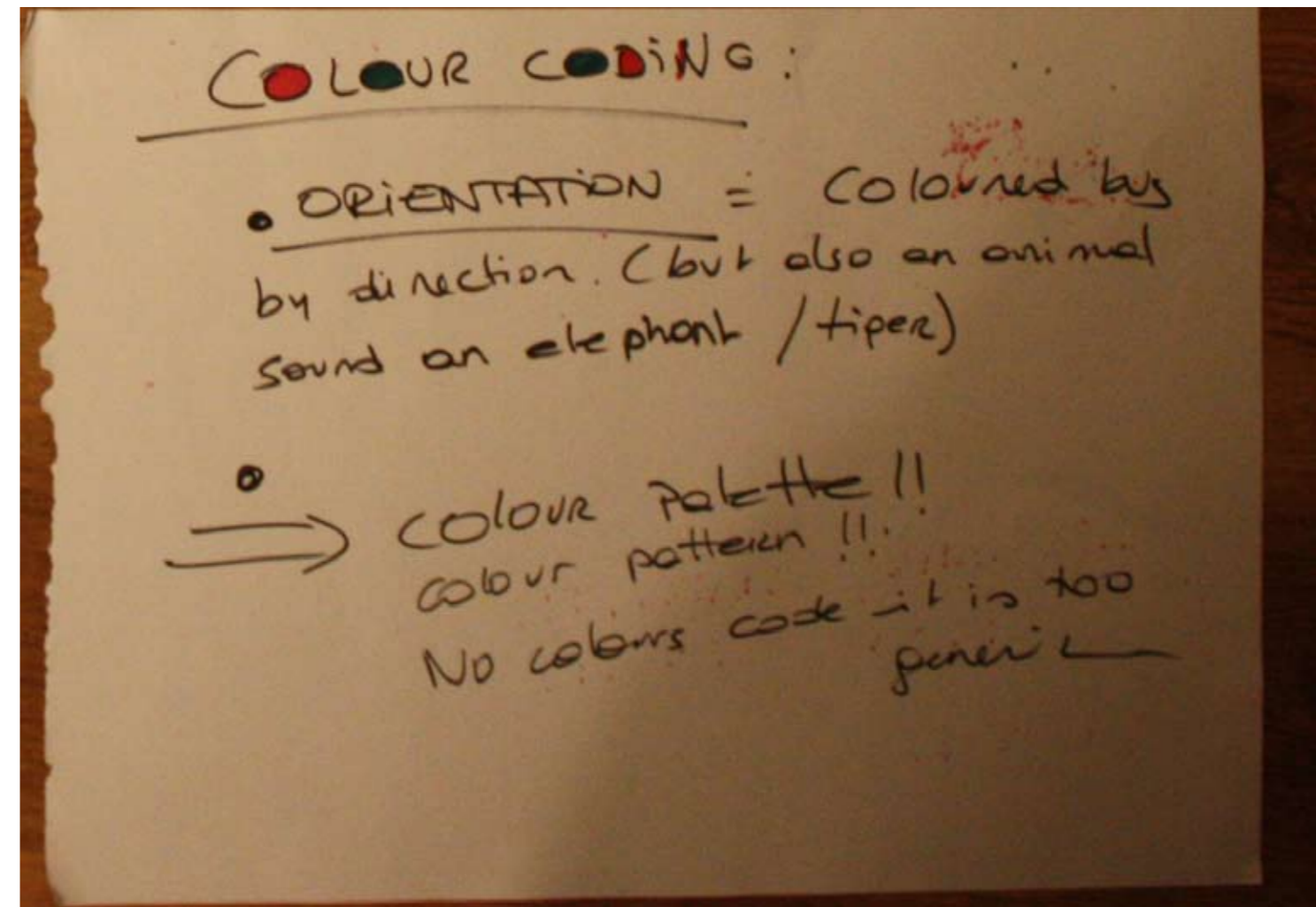
“Colour coding”

Social psychology and studies in cognitive behavior show that people are influenced by a range of factors and seemingly arbitrary elements of an experience, such as color.

Studies have shown that, for instance, the color red has the effect of reducing our risk-taking behavior. This human response to the colour red may be positive or negative.

It has also been suggested that the recognition of objects by those suffering from Alzheimer’s disease may be strongly influenced by image format (e.g. colour).

Train stations in Wales could use colour in a subtle but structural way to improve the service and journey experience of a wide variety of users.





conclusion

It is clear that accessibility is a complex issue. It is apparent to many users that a number of Welsh train stations have accessibility problems.

We did not seek to highlight specific problems related to individual stations. We also did not seek to address the more common accessibility issues.

What ARK has highlighted is that accessibility is a broad issue and one that requires immediate attention and creative input.

The process that we undertook **was entirely through voluntary participation** by ARK members. What we sought to highlight to Arriva, National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government is that creativity, design and social innovation can have an important role to play in developing stronger solutions to the accessibility problems faced by train users.

ARK stresses the importance of the National Assembly for Wales exploring and understanding the role of design thinking when taking

forward any recommendations from this consultation.

The benefits from utilising social design and co-production methods (as opposed to standard public consultations) could be far reaching in improving the accessibility and vitality of Welsh train stations

