

GREEN WAYS TO HEALTH

POSSILPARK HEALTH & CARE CENTRE



CHALLENGES

Although the features introduced by the project are well integrated into the scheme, they were not part of the original architects' plans. Retrofitting should be the exception rather than the norm when commissioning and constructing new healthcare facilities. Building green infrastructure into the planning and design process from the start creates more opportunities and makes it easier and cheaper to develop.

Another challenge has been the negotiations needed to use land that might become a site for development. Although it sits on the same patch of long-derelict ground, the urban garden is not part of the NHS estate, and it has taken a long time to arrange a formal lease. An agreement is now in place for three years with an option to renew, but the benefits the project brings will have been worthwhile even if the scheme has to close after a relatively short life. Support from the centre's GP practices for the concept of a community garden was an important factor in helping to arrange the lease.

Getting the project from vision to reality has meant working with a lot of different partners and stakeholders, firstly to convince them of its value, then to agree exactly what would happen, and finally to manage its implementation. That long process requires flexibility to recognise and meet different organisations' priorities, but also a sometimes dogged persistence to keep driving the project forward.



**SUSTAINABILITY
ACTION**

Our NHS Our People Our Planet

CASE STUDY



GREENING THE CITY

There is little scope to create large, open greenspace around the centre, but the scheme has added features to the original design that give the building a softer, more natural setting. A triangle of planting just next to the main entrance adds colour and texture, and makes the approach less harsh. Along the front, a line of standard trees brings green features to one of Glasgow's main arterial routes as well as providing shading that helps to regulate inside temperatures for staff and patients. Beech hedging has been planted along the boundary of the car park behind the centre, which would otherwise have been a plain concrete wall.

Trees along the centre's front on Saracen Street bring a welcome softness to a busy urban environment. The urban gym replaces a derelict border to a popular path.

A path running beside the centre was well-used but in a derelict state. The project improved it and helped to install an urban gym – a stretch of wall with instructions for exercises set into pre-cast concrete slabs. The wall has become a popular meeting point for a local jogging club and is a gentlereminder of the possibility of taking low-level exercise..

“I’m getting to know lots of my neighbours who I never knew before. Now when we see each other on the street we wave or stop and chat. It has really changed my experience of living in this community.”

Back Garden plot holder



GROW YOUR OWN HEALTH

Behind the centre, some of the derelict ground has been developed into an urban garden with small “starter plots” that can be adopted by local residents or organisations. The local community health partnership funded a post for a garden coordinator from Concrete Garden, a local food growing and waste reduction project, and the space has become a popular feature. Plots are managed by local residents, including people from Chinese and other ethnic minority communities. One of the plots is tended by a GP practice from the centre.

Local residents now call this popular space “The Back Garden”. It offers an enjoyable way for people who may otherwise be socially isolated to meet and make friends, as well as providing the satisfaction of growing vegetables and flowers. It adds the possibility of healthy, creative activity to the more conventional services offered at the centre, contributing to the ideal of a health service that promotes health rather than just treating illness.

Support from the GP practices based in the health centre helped to get the garden established. The urban garden has turned derelict land into a productive, popular space.



CASE STUDY



Garden starter plots offer a chance for local people to find friends and support as part of a healthier lifestyle – the vegetables are a bonus.

The new community health centre at Possilpark in Glasgow houses four GP practices, a dental surgery, and special services such as physiotherapy, youth health and stop smoking support. It serves an area with the second highest rate of deprivation in Scotland, with much derelict land and a poor quality urban environment.

Built at a cost of £10 million, the new centre is a major investment in the area's regeneration. It was planned as part of an effort to enable fundamental change, not just to replace the previous health centre building and its services. The health centre occupies part of a plot of vacant, derelict land, and originally there were plans to develop a business centre on the other part. The Green Exercise Partnership scheme aimed to use these developments as a springboard for general environmental improvement that will contribute to community health, create positive physical environments for wellbeing and offer new opportunities for community-based healthy lifestyle activities.

KEY LEARNING POINTS

- Our health is influenced by the quality of the environment where we live and work. Healthcare facilities should provide positive physical environments.
- Whenever possible, build plans for greenspace and landscaping into the original designs for a new site rather than retrospectively.
- Work with partners such as third-sector organisations that can help deliver and broaden the project's goals.
- Be prepared to be persistent through what can be a long-drawn out process.
- Health is everybody's business – not the sole responsibility of the NHS. We are collectively responsible for changing attitudes and influencing positive change.

THE GREEN EXERCISE PARTNERSHIP is a joint venture between Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and Health Scotland (the health improvement board of the National Health Service in Scotland). The Partnership aims to build links between the health and environment sectors, following growing evidence that public health can be improved by getting people engaged with the natural environment.

Through its Greening the NHS Estate programme, the Partnership aims to establish at least one project in each of the eleven mainland Area Health Boards. The projects aim to show the health benefits that flow from positive investment in and management of the NHS estate – the greenspace around hospitals and healthcare centres.

