



Maggie's Centre, Oldham - A Cancer Caring Centre Development

This case study puts the spotlight over Maggie's Oldham, a cancer facility based within the grounds of the Royal Oldham Hospital in North West England. Ever since the launch of the first HAPPI report at Maggie's West London, the Housing LIN has taken a keen interest in the hospice design and published a selection of case studies that exemplify innovation in creating caring spaces and places for people at end of life.

Designed by this year's Stirling Prize winning practice dRMM in partnership with developers, The Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, it combines a built-in, very visible holistic design message that supports the central aims



The building is landscaped to feature nature both inside and out for holistic benefits

of the design to achieve a cancer caring community. These characteristics are then coupled with a vision to uplift and offer hope to people living with cancer. This case study is also timely as these features have been recognised by RIBA and the Centre has just been shortlisted for the RIBA North West Awards.

Written by **Viv Beech** on behalf of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network

April 2018

Introduction

For those suffering with cancer and their families, it is imperative that care and support services are well facilitated with qualified professionals presenting a warm and welcoming yet professional environment. As the number of people living with cancer increases, so does the need for practical and emotional support to cope with the challenges that living with cancer brings.

Maggie's centres are cancer care centres based in NHS cancer hospitals throughout the country providing free practical and emotional support across the cancer spectrum. Taking pride in their warm and welcoming environment, a large programme of services are available to patients which have been shown to improve physical and emotional wellbeing.

Key design characteristics - 'the architecture of hope'

The design of the Oldham Centre was composed to create a homely environment in order to make patients feel 'safe, valuable and comfortable' - taking the hospital feel out of the building was a must.

The centre is a one-storey building supported over its garden by steel legs. Clad in corrugated, thermally treated tulipwood, and with the same wood worked into cross laminated timber to create the main load-bearing structure, the building is as lovely to look at as it is to use; the door fixings are timber too and the kitchen features an enormous plank of walnut as a work surface.



A view of the Pennines over the roofs of Oldham

The rectilinear building is raised above a garden filled with trees, and accessed by a wood and steel staircase at the back. A balcony stretches across the entrance side of the centre to provide an outdoor seating area, while at the rear, where the building juts out over a stone wall, a long horizontal window wraps the facade.

At the centre of the building, tall trees and plants emerge through the courtyard, which has glazing that follows a rippling curve around the interior perimeter. The internal space can be subdivided by a series of curtains, while the tree growing through the centre brings nature inside. Yellow-laminated flooring traces the pathway built around the courtyard, with enclaves built into the interior timber structure for patients to sit and look over the trees and plants outside. Thin strips of timber are echoed in the ceiling of the interior space, which when combined with the natural environment of the inner courtyard, create a softer and welcoming environment for patients.



The courtyard built around a tree at its core

“From the Oldham project inception we knew it was the right material for Maggie’s, not only structurally and visually, but conceptually”, says Alex de Rijke, director and co-founder of dRMM, “an elevated, open plan, all timber and glass building with trees growing through it, and every detail considered from the perspective of use, health, and delight was always going to be special.”

Realising the need for a union of privacy and collectivity, discreet meeting rooms and niches carved from a ‘thick’ wall were created. The rest of the interior space is completely open plan, planned around the central lightwell. The materials are dRMM’s characteristic engineered timber and glass and the outside reflects the presence and colours of the garden.

The garden at Maggie’s Oldham flows below the building into a walled and secluded woodland sanctuary. To the north there’s a view across Oldham to the Pennines, where garden designer Rupert Muldoon drew inspiration to plant a textured, ephemeral wilderness - reflecting the mountains’ ever-changing weather. It is also ornamental and composed of highly scented flowers and shrubs.

On a gentler note, the greenhouse and potted herb garden offer a more social place with the opportunity of some hands-on gardening for centre visitors. The garden offers ‘open air rooms’ framed by pine and birch trees, with a reflecting pool of rainwater discovered underneath the building.

Architecture - material for the mind, the body and the soul



Rippling glass walls looking into the courtyard

Not only is Maggie's a cancer care facility at the top of its league in terms of care and support, it boasts as the first hardwood cross laminated timber (CLT) building in the world, clad with tulipwood. This might not seem of importance at first glance, but architects dRMM drew influence from 2015's Wood Housing Humanity Report. There it stated the positive influence wood has on people and for the beauty, strength and warmth inherent to American tulipwood.

According to the same report, wood is known to significantly reduce blood pressure, heart rates and recovery times and more health and wellbeing benefits than any other building material. With this in mind, the material is intended to create a natural and organic environment for future patients to experience within the centre.

"One of the side effects of chemotherapy is that hands and feet can be very sensitive," explains dRMM director, Alex de Rijke, "so one of the reasons timber was used in this project is because it is warm to the touch."

"But the use of wood at Maggie's is just part of a bigger design intention to reverse the norms of hospital architecture where clinical institutionalised environments and management procedures can make patients feel dispirited and disempowered".

And in recognition of their work designing the first engineered hardwood building in the world, dRMM have won Healthcare Project of the Year at the 2017 Structural Timber Awards.

Care and support services - adjusting effectively to living with cancer in Oldham

Annually, the Royal Oldham hospital supports a population of 820,000 people, of whom 10,000 will use Maggie's once it is fully established. In 2012, the hospital saw the opening of two new satellite radiotherapy centres.

The Christie's Centre that houses these radiotherapy units, as well as other cancer services is expected to see a large increase in cancer patients over the next decade - the centre is working to



The garden includes a greenhouse for horticultural therapy

introduce a comprehensive satellite chemotherapy service. With such a dense local population and surrounding areas of Greater Manchester, there was an urgent need for Maggie's.

Having a healthy frame of mind is vital for those going through an unforgiving time in their lives. A welcoming and warm environment with dedicated full-time professionals offering tailored advice and guidance is at the patients' disposal. Alongside more common forms of stress reducing and relaxation methods such as yoga and tai-chi, one-to-one or group sessions with a clinical psychologist, art therapy and creative writing courses are a few of the emotional support services available.



Feels more like a home than a hospital: natural light through the rippling glass walls

Practical means of support might include advice about benefit entitlements and eating well. Patients are able to access specialist help for managing hair loss and skin care both during and after treatment; enriching courses are available such as 'Getting Started', for people who are newly diagnosed; or 'Where Now?' for those adjusting to life after cancer.

Social support comes from the people who work in and visit Maggie's centres, the supportive community around each kitchen table of people who understand what it is to be living with cancer. The architectural brilliance of the centre is married with these exceptional emotional, practical and social support services - all of which had been taken into account when designing the building.

"This beautiful and unique building has been thoughtfully designed and wrapped with a wonderful garden which, alongside our expert staff and evidence based programme of support, will give people the peace of mind they need to live with and beyond cancer", concludes Bernie Byrne, Centre Head at Maggie's Oldham.

Conclusion

All Maggie's centres rely on voluntary donations to support and grow its network and develop its unique, high quality programme of support. With an aim of making the biggest difference possible to people living with cancer and their family and friends, the design of Maggie's Oldham had to fit in line with their vision of an 'architecture of hope'.

The tulipwood cladding and wooden effect throughout the centre is noted to improve the wellbeing of patients and I am sure that other schemes, with the right funding and support, will follow suit in using CLT as a solution to improving emotional stability across the country.

What is taken from this centre, is a service rich in support within an architecturally impressive centre, resulting in an overriding feeling of positivity and acceptance of cancer. As patient David Whaley, Managing Editor at Oldham Evening Chronicle describes, "*cancer does not define you. And you are not alone.*"



Open kitchenette area

Note

We are grateful to Vivienne Long at de Rijke Marsh Morgan Architects for permission to use text and images they supplied. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 40,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England and Wales to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population.

Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'knowledge hub' on specialist housing, our online and regional networked activities:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing choices that enable older and disabled people to live independently
- provide intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice developments, and
- raise the profile of specialist housing with developers, commissioners and providers to plan, design and deliver aspirational housing for an ageing population.

To view other examples of hospice design and more information on end of life care, visit the Housing LIN's dedicated pages at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/CareAndSupportatHome/EndOfLifeCare/>

Published by

Housing Learning & Improvement Network
c/o EAC, 3rd Floor,
89 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7TP

Tel: 020 7820 8077

Email: info@housinglin.org.uk

Web: www.housinglin.org.uk

Twitter: @HousingLIN & @HousingLINews