



Sensitive hospice design: A holistic end of life caring environment

This case study provides an overview of the award winning design characteristics that formed the brief to convert The Mary Stevens Hospice in Stourbridge into a contemporary building that can provide a holistic setting for people living with cancer and other life-limiting illnesses, staff and the wider community.



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About Mary Stevens Hospice

Based in Stourbridge, Shropshire, The Mary Stevens Hospice is a charity offering specialist care for people living with cancer and other life-limiting illnesses. Their care is holistic, supportive and aims to relieve symptoms, improve quality of life and maintain dignity whilst helping people to live life to its full potential.

In Spring 2013, KKE Architects were invited to design a scheme to upgrade their existing buildings giving them extra much-needed facilities as well as re-configuring the main entrance to the hospice. The brief set by the hospice was to convert the existing 4 bedroom wards into 10 new single bedrooms with en-suites and individual accesses into the garden area; provide a new staff room and staff changing facility, create a new Peace Room, modernise the reception area and create additional office space.

Scheme Description

The Hospice is sited on an incline rising from the road towards the back of the site. The single storey main entrance to the Hospice In-Patient Unit (IPU) was positioned to the rear elevation a few metres lower than the access road making it difficult for patients and visitors to clearly identify the main door. The proposal addresses this problem by adding a two-storey extension adjacent the entrance to generate a clear focal point, a double height space entrance canopy, and change in material and form to clearly mark the point of access.



The existing hospice IPU building is a red brick faced building with a single-ply flat roof edged with a concrete tiled pitched roof. The main structure of the extension has been constructed in a steel framing system selected to provide a large insulation zone without increasing the thickness of the external wall construction. The external materials of the building are contrasting to clearly distinguish between the new and existing building and highlight the main entrance. The ground floor front elevation has been clad in thick vertical oak planks curving into the entrance canopy, along with vertical larch tree trunk fencing that screens the ambulance entrance and exit.

The main elevation has taken advantage of its north facing aspect by providing a single large glazed opening to the first floor bringing natural light to the office without the issue of

solar over heating. Internally the elliptical shape of the double storey Peace Room, along with its adjustable lighting, timber clad walls, under floor heating and cloud structures within its atrium, provides an outlet for reflection away from the rest of the hospice. The internal materials are unique to the rest of the building, again to emphasise the bespoke nature of the space. The shape of the Peace Room has also been reflected externally in plan to guide visitors into the reception, and repeated in form with a large oval roof light within the entrance canopy which appears to be weightless and frameless.

A traditional contract route was selected to control quality and the project was won by local contractor Spectus. Demolition works on site started in November 2013 and final completion was achieved in December 2014.

Community Engagement

The new extension to The Mary Stevens Hospice provides care for up to 500 patients and 2,000 family members a year in Stourbridge. The primary aim of the extension was to provide patients, staff and the wider community with additional facilities in order for the Hospice to extend its reach for care and services. The local community has benefited from a modernised extension that has allowed the hospice to expand its care services to more patients. Provision for accommodating a community team on the first floor means that patients can be cared for from home in the future through the development of a hospice at home team.

The one and a half storey high entrance recess has a seat sculpted into one wall while above a deeply recessed ovoid rooflight cuts its way up through the fabric of the building. The client commented on the fact that many patients' first experience of arriving at the building may be from an ambulance stretcher trolley and that the view up into the sculptural rooflight creates an uplifting first impression of the facilities.

The culturally sensitive Peace Room is a spiritually uplifting top-lit double height space. The oval room is a white space without windows fostering a quiet contemplative mood, the light flooding in from above is diffused by white perforated suspended 'clouds'. When the sun is directly overhead the rays are picked up through hanging crystals which cast colourful shadows through the perforations and round the room. This room is used by patients, their relatives and the wider community.



Stevan Jackson, Chief Executive of The Mary Stevens Hospice commented:

"The supportive local community who we serve deserves a new, modern, contemporary and professional building to be proud of; the stunning visual clarity of the design and the excellent quality of the private facilities within the new 10 bedroom In-Patient Unit provides exactly what our patients and their families require to continue to be superbly cared for."



Accessibility

This is at the heart of the hospice's brief. Patients are at end-of-life or suffering from life-limiting conditions, and are dealing with disability, often in advanced age. Accessibility is a priority as it impacts on the dignity of patients: a central focus of the hospice's work.

It was therefore decided at an early stage to dedicate the ground level storey of the building to patients and the reception area. The first floor offices are separately accessed from the external porch area. Their entrance is concealed by the curved timber cladding on the approach to the building, which cleverly avoids any confusion with the primary entrance. From the flat and level main entrance, all thresholds are level throughout so that wheelchairs, which normally have smaller diameter wheels, are manoeuvrable outside in fine weather.

Ground level accommodates a variety of activities and the automatic doors open up to: reception, patient rooms and a specially designed peace room for quiet contemplation. Doors are wide enough for passage by wheelchairs, and light switches are mounted at accessible heights, while counters in the reception and day room include sections at wheelchair height.

Sustainability

The new expansion to the hospice has been adopted into the existing heating and electrical system. To maximise efficiency a fabric first approach has been taken throughout the design and construction of this building. A lightweight steel framing system has been used to provide a large zone for insulation and reduce embedded carbon materials. This coupled with the other high performing construction elements of the building, balanced with good design and workmanship has eliminated any thermal bridging and provided an air tight, highly insulated building.

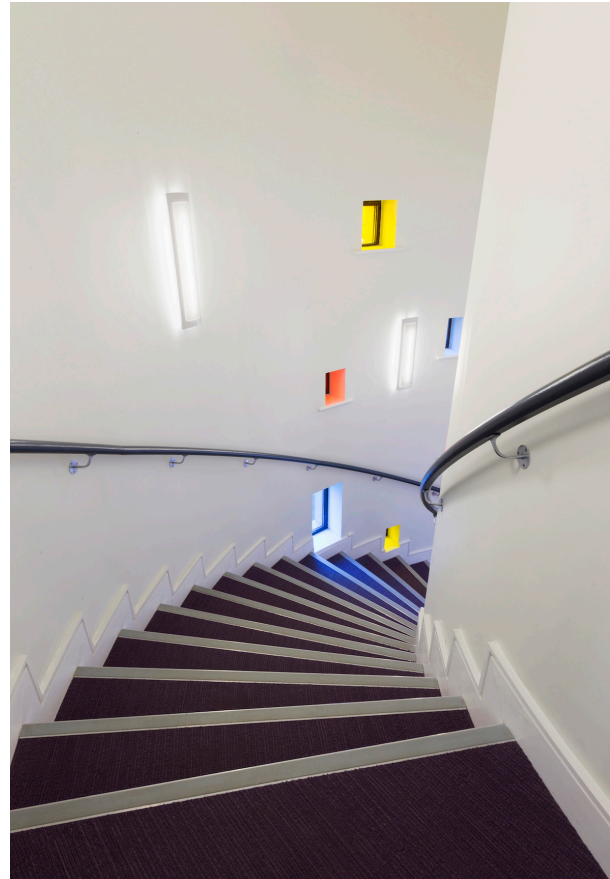
The mechanical services energy consumption has been further reduced with the inclusion of heat recovery fresh air mechanical ventilation units. Actuated windows will provide natural ventilation to the majority of the first floor of the building, reducing the energy consumption associated with mechanical fans and incoming tempered air.

The north facing facade of the building has been used to maximise natural daylight through the addition of a large area of glazing and roof lights without solar overheating issues. The majority of the building is illuminated using high efficiency LED luminaries which provide a much longer life span over traditional methods of lighting, using significantly less energy when in use.

Overall, the additional annexe to the Hospice has provided a high-quality, energy efficient extension which minimises its load on the existing system. This in turn meant the existing heating system did not need to be replaced.

Awards

At the recent 2015 RIBA Awards ceremony, KKE Architects won both a West Midlands Award and the Small Project of the Year Award. These are a selection of the judges' comments:



“On the ground floor the automatic entrance doors lead into a simply treated reception space off which the oval shaped Peace room opens. This cocooning room is designed for quiet contemplation and is predominantly illuminated by diffused top light that filters through and around perforated ‘free form’ panels that are suspended from above and that the architect refers to as ‘cloud structures’. This is a simple, cost effective and poetically appealing device that transforms the character of the space. Attention to detail is apparent in elements such as the small cupboard for audio visual equipment that is concealed within the white painted ribbed boarding of the curved walls.”

“This attention to detail is also apparent in the new bedrooms where the functional requirements for a hoist are skillfully handled by using recessed wall tracks and adopting a bespoke solution for concealing the ‘parked’ hoist harness within the upper section of a wardrobe. The overall impression is of a simply decorated hotel bedroom rather than a hospital room.”

Small Project of the Year

The jury felt that this project should receive the Small Project of the Year award in recognition of the care, thoughtfulness and attention to detail that it demonstrated.

Jorge Eguiguren, Project Director at KKE Architects adds:

“we were thrilled to receive these awards, especially in the year we celebrate our 10th anniversary – it was our role as architects to reinvigorate the hospice, creating an uplifting place that will accompany patients and families to come through difficult times.”

Lesson Learned

When extending a hospice building the primary concern is to allow smooth running of the services to continue with as little disruption as possible. The longer the building is on site the more disruption there will be – or so we thought. The contractors for this project were a small company and the programme, which had been agreed with the hospice, was longer than it might have been. Although we initially thought this could lead to problems, quite the reverse happened. The site wasn't flooded with tradesmen confined in a small space; this gave a less intense build with no complaints from the staff or patients as everyone felt that their needs were taken into consideration. If a quiet time for consultation was needed, work was done elsewhere – quite a revelation and one we will endeavor to repeat.

As work on updating existing bathrooms had to be carried out next to occupied bedrooms a traditional strip-out of the tiling was ruled out as this would create long periods of disruptive noise. Instead it was decided to over-tile the existing, not a traditional approach but much appreciated by patients, their families and staff.

We have always had issues with handing over complicated services. In this project the Building Manager was keen to be consulted and had input throughout the design, as a result he had ownership of the scheme. Before handover, training workshops giving practical demonstrations were organized for all involved – after nearly a year of occupation it is safe to say a smooth transition has been achieved.

Conclusion

As hospice architects it is always a great pleasure to hand over a building that will enhance the care that is already provided to the local community. The enthusiasm from Mary Stevens has been whole-hearted and there is already discussion for future plans. They are proud that the RIBA has recognised their building as being worthy of two awards. This has had a marked effect on their fund raising as the press and social media has generated increased awareness of who they are and the services they provide.

Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Housing LIN (Learning and Improvement Network).

About KKE Architects



Formed in 2005, KKE Architects is an award winning architectural and landscape practice. We have 11 professionals, mainly architects and technologists, also including Olivia Kirk, Chelsea gold medal winning landscape and garden designer, and Andrew Jennings who combines interior designer with architectural technology. We are a close team, committed to improving the design of palliative care facilities in the independent third sector. We work with a small selection of other professionals in whom we trust and with whom we deliver. From Worcester we have completed 50 hospice projects throughout the UK in the period from 2005 to present day. We are presently engaged on projects that vary in size from £100,000 up to and exceeding £10 million.

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN (Learning and Improvement Network) is the leading 'learning lab' for a growing network of housing, health and social care professionals in England and Wales involved in planning, commissioning, designing, funding, building and managing housing, care and support services for older people and vulnerable adults with long term conditions.

Previously responsible for managing the Department of Health's Extra Care Housing Fund, the Housing LIN is called upon by a wide range of statutory and other organisations to provide expert advice and support regarding the implementation of policy and good practice in the field of housing, care and support services.

Further information about the Housing LIN's comprehensive list of online resources on end of life care can be found at:

www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Housing/EndOfLifeCare/

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