

Royal Cornwall Hospital (RCH) Healing Garden

Truro, Cornwall

Cormac in Partnership with Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS (Treliske) Trust

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: Multi Benefits

Project overview (50 words max)

The Royal Cornwall Hospital at Treliske in Truro has a special Healing Garden for the rehabilitation of critically ill patients. The garden provides multi-benefits from the creation of a diverse habitat which is also a peaceful, healing space for patients, families, staff and volunteers, enhancing recovery and well-being through nature.

50 words

What were the biodiversity conditions on site prior to the enhancement? (100 words max)

There was minimal biodiversity prior to the scheme. The site was 250 square metres of concrete serving no ecological function offering limited habitat. The initiative was driven by Kym Vigus, a Critical Care Nurse and Cornish explorer Robin Hanbury-Tenison, following his recovery from Covid in a similar garden. It was funded solely by charitable donations helped by Robin and his wife Louella.

The Healing Garden supports severely unwell patients, aligning with policies aimed at enhancing patient recovery through holistic approaches. The project promotes physical and emotional healing and rehabilitation, together with a heightened awareness and appreciation of biodiversity.

98 words

What were the reasons behind this project? (100 words max)

The project was initiated primarily to create a therapeutic space for critically ill patients and their families, as well as staff, to enhance their recovery through exposure to nature.

Incorporating biodiversity into the garden's design was seen as a key factor in the successful design of the project. Doing this 'one thing' for biodiversity enhancement enabled greater broader environmental goals to be achieved, contributing to wider awareness of local biodiversity and supporting this focussed natural ecosystem.

Whilst BREEAM was not applicable to this project, self-established sustainability goals including net zero carbon design standards were achieved or exceeded.

100 words



Patient Lizzie enjoying the new healing garden Credit: Royal Cornwall Hospital (Treliske)



Before: An unloved and unused concrete courtyard. Credit: Royal Cornwall Hospital (Treliske)

What were the biodiversity measures taken? (300 words max)

This project is highly replicable. As a trailblazing project creating one of the first therapeutic gardens in the UK to have medical gases piped into an outdoor space, the design and approach can (and should be!) shared with all hospitals and care facilities. In this way other hospitals could create similar therapeutic gardens, taking the Biodiversity Challenge and improve patient care through the integration of nature. Hospitals with gardens and community spaces positively impact the immune functions and emotional well-being of patients, their families, and staff.

The design, by landscape architects Lavigne Lonsdale, includes provisions for its long-term maintenance, ensuring it remains a valuable space for over five years and beyond, without significant drain on valuable NHS resources. Ongoing community volunteer and staff engagement will support its upkeep, with ex-patients particularly eager to look after this garden which became important to their lives.

The Healing Garden is innovative in being one of the first in the UK to have medical gases piped directly into an outdoor space, allowing critically ill patients to spend extended periods outside, aiding their speedier recovery. The project also demonstrates the medical theory that exposure to nature significantly reduces blood pressure, respiration rate, and stress hormone levels within minutes, with over 90% of people reporting improved mood after spending time in nature.

By adding green space and diverse plant life, the garden supports local biodiversity initiatives and action plans aimed at increasing urban green spaces and supporting local wildlife.

There is a huge value in terms of human social benefits. The planting scheme designed by local expert gardeners, from The Lost Gardens of Heligan and the National Trust's Glendurgan Garden, included plants with sensory properties such as texture, smell, colour, and movement, enhancing the ecological value of the area by attracting pollinators and other beneficial insects.

300 words



Concept design: virtual reality presented to stakeholders. Credit: Lavigne Lonsdale



The rehabilitation bridge. Credit: Royal Cornwall Hospital (Treliske)

Further information (250 words max)

The design by Lavigne Lonsdale (Landscape Architects) incorporated sensory plants, seating areas, and functional spaces including a 'rehabilitation' bridge. Key to the project's success was the early involvement of stakeholders in its design. CCU staff, fundraisers, ex-patients, their families and carers.

The bridge has a ramp at one end and steps at the other to aid critical patient mobility. Timber pergolas, curved benches and a wheelchair accessible table were constructed on site and granite sett bases installed.

The legacy and multiple benefits of the Critical Care Healing Garden at the Hospital reflect its comprehensive approach to integrating biodiversity and patient care. The project has created habitat for local wildlife, engaged the local community and reused materials in a sustainable manner. It is an innovative, replicable model for therapeutic gardens in healthcare settings, aligning with local biodiversity action plans demonstrating a successful blend of ecological enhancement and social responsibility.

The creation of the Healing Garden Hospital has led to a noted increase in biodiversity. The project transformed a previously unused and neglected yard into a vibrant garden filled with diverse plant species, which has created a valuable habitat for local wildlife.

The planting scheme, designed by expert gardeners, included sensory plants that attract pollinators and other beneficial insects, thereby enhancing the ecological value of the area. By introducing diverse plant species, the garden has increased local biodiversity, supporting various plant and animal species. Doing this 'one thing' for biodiversity enhancement activated a wider awareness of local biodiversity and ecosystems.

248 words

*Opening Ceremony for media and stakeholders
with Robin Hanbury-Tenison OBE
Credit: Royal Cornwall Hospital (Treliske)*



A new habitat integrating biodiversity and patient care. Credit: Royal Cornwall Hospital (Treliske).



Project Team

Client(s)/Funder(s)

The client is Steve Williamson, Chief Executive Officer, Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS (Treliske) Trust. All the funding for this £135,000 project was raised by local donations.

Other design team members

- Kym Vigus, dedicated Critical Care Nurse
- The renowned Cornish explorer Robin Hanbury-Tenison OBE, Robin as former patient and his wife Louella as primary motivators and fundraisers
- The [Royal Cornwall Hospitals Charity](#) were responsible for the coordination of the fund raising and donations.
- Cormac
- South West Surfacing Specialists Ltd.
- Ward Williams Associates,
- Nick Fish, Landscape Architect, Lavigne Lonsdale
- Mark Holman of local landscape firm 'The Palace Gardener'

Volunteer organisations

- Many individuals and groups volunteered their time, resources, and expertise, reflecting a collective desire to contribute positively to the hospital environment and support patient recovery.
- Head gardeners Charles Fox from the National Trust's Glendurgan Garden and Alasdair Moore from The Lost Gardens of Heligan.
- Local filmmaker Peter Champness created a documentary free of charge.
- Support to the project was also given by Lord Markham from the New Hospital Programme and the Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall.

What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement? (100 words max)

Hospitals with gardens can positively impact the immune functions and emotional well-being of patients, their families, and staff. The garden creates an immersive feeling to those lying on a hospital bed or in a wheelchair. Planting provides the sensory experiences of texture, scent, colour, movement and also screening to support and respect patients' dignity.

Research shows that hours spent in hospital rooms contribute to a negative effect on one's mental health, whilst exposure to nature, significantly reduces blood pressure, respiration rate, and stress hormone levels within minutes. Over 90% of people report improved mood after spending time in nature.

99 words



Cormac on site during construction Photo Credit: Cormac