

## The Centre for Sustainable Healthcare – the NHS Forest at University Hospital in Coventry

University Hospital Coventry has created a wonderful NHS Forest site by replacing a destitute swamp area with a beautiful new Nature Reserve. The NHS Forest team secured Big Lottery funding for a local charity to coordinate a group of local volunteers to improve to the site's accessibility, by installing benches and creating pathways throughout the project area and building a small bridge, steps and a pond dipping platform. The site also features a community orchard with local apple varieties and local wildlife has been encouraged by installing an otter holt.



Before (left): The project site was a haven for wildlife, but was a boggy wetland, inaccessible and too overgrown for people to enjoy.

After (right): The site now features well marked paths, sensory plants, fruit trees and benches. The area is used by community members, patients and staff at the busy hospital. The wildlife are still

present and can now be enjoyed by local people – for example, school children at local schools and an extended learning centre (or ELC) for children at risk of exclusion from mainstream schooling have been engaged in pond dipping and 'minibeast' hunting. This reconnects them with the natural environment, as well as enhancing their education.



The children have also taken part in outdoor yoga classes in the green space. A secondary school pupil in their GCSE year observed that the nature reserve is, *"A calm and relaxing place to visit, ... quiet and very beautiful. A nice place to clear your head and make thoughts."*

A teacher at the ELC has commented, *"It is inspiring and gratifying to see pupils engaging in meaningful work. ... Pupils {have been able} to develop their self-esteem through environmental work in the natural environment. They are always proud of their achievements."*



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Patient groups have also benefited from the project. For example, members of the hospital's Gut-Digestive Tract Cancer Support Group organise regular visits to the site and have planted a tree as a memorial to lost family members and as a symbol of hope for the future. A member of the group said, *"It's a really nice space to think of your life and your loved ones"*.

Members of the community in this part of Coventry have shown their appreciation of the project by naming the space 'Jubilee Nature Reserve' in honour of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The site is marked by signposts around the hospital as well as featuring engaging information boards in the green space. This one explains which varieties of apples are present in the community orchard and how the apple trees are important for local wildlife. They encourage local people to enjoy the space and celebrate the area's natural heritage by featuring local species to build community pride.



Clive Robinson, the Environmental Manager at the hospital, has summed up the NHS Forest's success: *"The impact of this project has been phenomenal because of the diverse range of people involved - staff, patients, visitors, the local community and school children of all ages. It is a beautiful space and the project has helped harvest green-fingered health heroes with the community, local business, schools and day centres."* He also asserts that the project would not even have started without the support and involvement of the NHS Forest staff and that it has been important that the scheme is part of a wider, national programme. The site features in a short film which features local beneficiaries: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5bD5AGetbc>

The NHS Forest team have recently worked with NHS staff at the site, local schools and extended learning centre and Coventry-based charity Garden Organic to devise a fresh phase of the project so that an overgrown planting area at the site can be restored as a community growing area by local community members and school children. The NHS team have submitted a bid for funding this life-enhancing work to the Big Lottery and expect to hear their decision in the summer.

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