

West Berkshire Community Hospital - A green and good space



Summary

The therapy garden at West Berkshire Community Hospital (WBCH) is an amazing and invaluable oasis and resource for patients, their visitors and carers as well as staff.

Staff and volunteers have created a garden that provides a wide range of benefits that support and enhance the patients' care and wellbeing during their stay at the hospital.

As a healthcare resource it provides a range of activities and therapies for patients in a relaxing and peaceful outdoor space. It produces a range of fruit, vegetables and flowers as well as supporting a much wider agenda in relation to supporting biodiversity and the greening of the hospital site.



Pathways and seating in the therapy garden

It is also a vital space that is used by staff to recharge and recuperate during rest breaks and emphasises the benefits of nature for positive health and wellbeing for all.

What we did

With plans drawn up, funding sourced and after much discussion the hard landscaping commenced. This includes pathways, seating areas and greenhouse which were all suitable for all patients to access.

Then the planting began, which was designed to provide a space that has evolved and matured into a welcoming and calming space that supports a range of therapeutic and wellbeing activities.

This small plot of land is now a welcoming place rich in flowers, fruit and vegetables with seating areas to sit and enjoy the environment. It has transformed an area that was once a rather sterile, angular concrete and brick outside space that was not inviting or green – in colour or environmentally.



Pathway to the greenhouse

The challenges

As with any new project there were a few hurdles overcome and the therapy garden at WBCH was no exception. Planning the hard landscaping and getting all the necessary permissions was critical. The plot itself covers an area that has a complex network of underground utilities and services which could not be disturbed and had to be worked round.

Ensuring that all interested parties were involved was vital and managing these processes was a challenge but one that was necessary to guarantee stakeholder buy in and the project's success.

It was also important to ensure that on-going maintenance was planned for and factored in to enable the garden to be constantly kept up to scratch.

Outcomes

The result is a therapy garden that provides a huge range of benefits to all to who work, stay or visit the hospital.

It has been designed to be a sensory garden with herbs to touch and smell and includes a special owl sculpture, which is very tactile and all patients are actively encouraged to touch it.

Patients and their visitors are also encouraged to pick the soft fruits and tomatoes as well as cutting flowers from the cutting beds.

One of the objectives of the garden was to encourage reminiscing and help patients with dementia.



The tactile owl sculpture

The key outcome is that the hospital has a facility that enhances and supports the patient recuperation, healthcare and wellbeing. Some of the specific benefits are:

- Patient activities, ranging from gardening to creative arts projects
- Occupational health therapies
- Distraction therapies
- Support local biodiversity and habitat creation
- Produce fruit and vegetables
- A place for patients and their visitors to sit in a relaxing garden environment
- links with the community through volunteers – individual and corporate



Some of the produce grown in the garden and enjoyed at West Berkshire Community

The therapy garden provides a very special place that provides a space that allows solace and recuperation as well as activity. All of which contribute to supporting the patient's overall health and wellbeing.



The white flower zone

Next steps

The therapy garden is a fantastic achievement, which could only have been achieved with incredible hard work and dedication by the hospital staff and volunteers who work tirelessly to take care of this incredible space.

There are a number of exciting plans and projects that are at the discussion stage. One that is about to commence is the planting of some fruit trees. These will be the first of what is hoped will develop into a fantastic orchard.

There are detailed plans to link with the Occupational Health Department to provide facilities that assist in rehabilitation therapies with their patients.

There are also the embryonic thoughts and discussions to increase and maximise the huge potential for green therapies, which will complement and enhance the patient's healthcare experience. These could include therapeutic walking tracks, an increase in tree planting to create visual stimulating vistas from ward windows and further areas to site and recuperate.

This hospital has huge potential to be an exemplary model of how the natural environment can be utilised to improve and support the wellbeing of all who visit the site. It can demonstrate how maximising the use of green spaces can be key part of a true sustainable healthcare service.



Aerial photomontage of therapy walkways and increase in tree planting