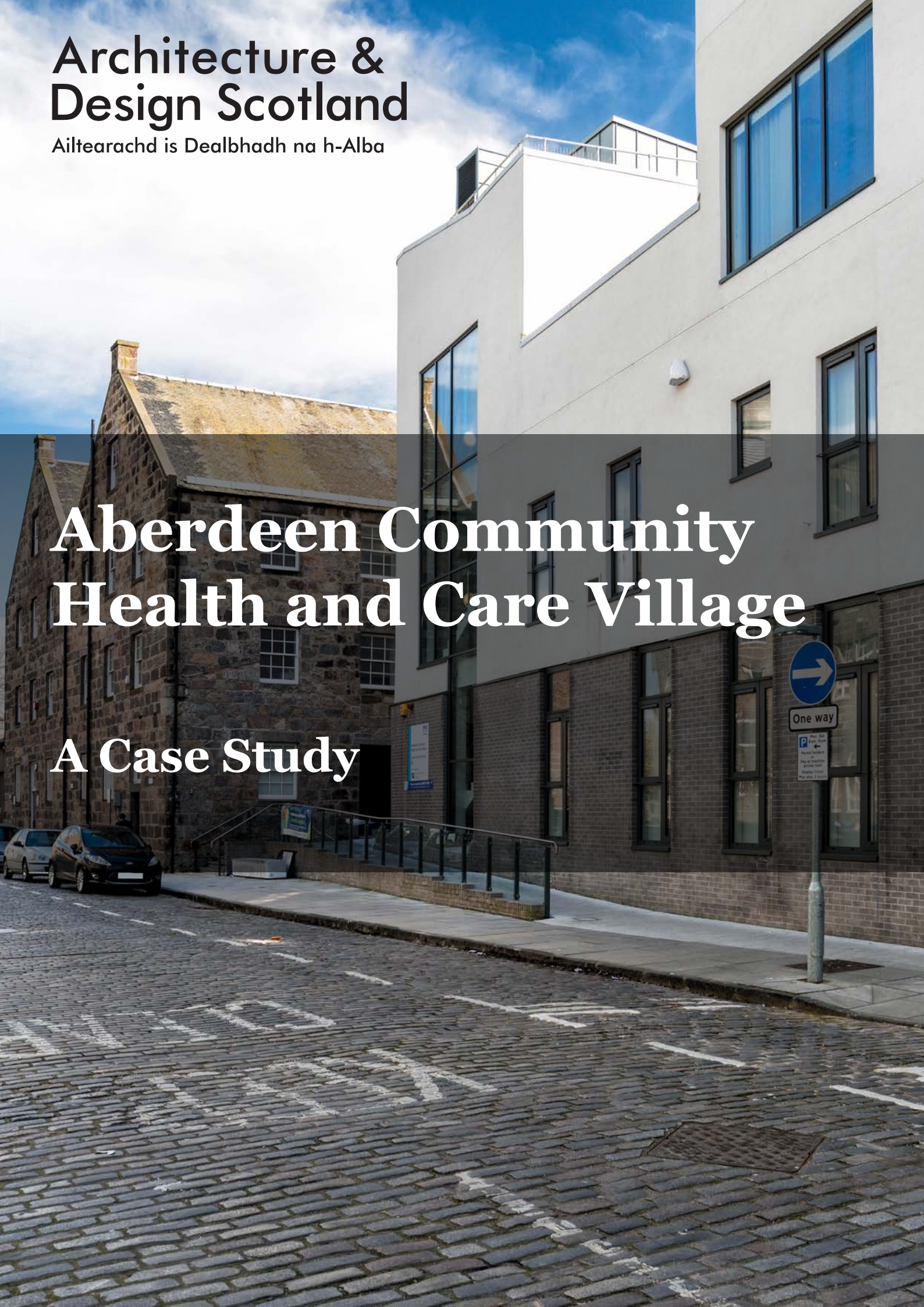


# Architecture & Design Scotland

Ailtearachd is Dealbhadh na h-Alba

## Aberdeen Community Health and Care Village

### A Case Study







*“it was an explicit intent when we started thinking about this facility, that we wanted it to have a multi-agency feel, and we wanted it to change the way that people engage with health services in that this building is about wellness, it’s not about illness, so we want people to actually come here with the intent of supporting them to remain healthy, well, independent and in their own community, and we will help to support them to do that, rather than the historical connotations associated with hospital”*

*Jackie Bremner, NHS Grampian*

## Overview

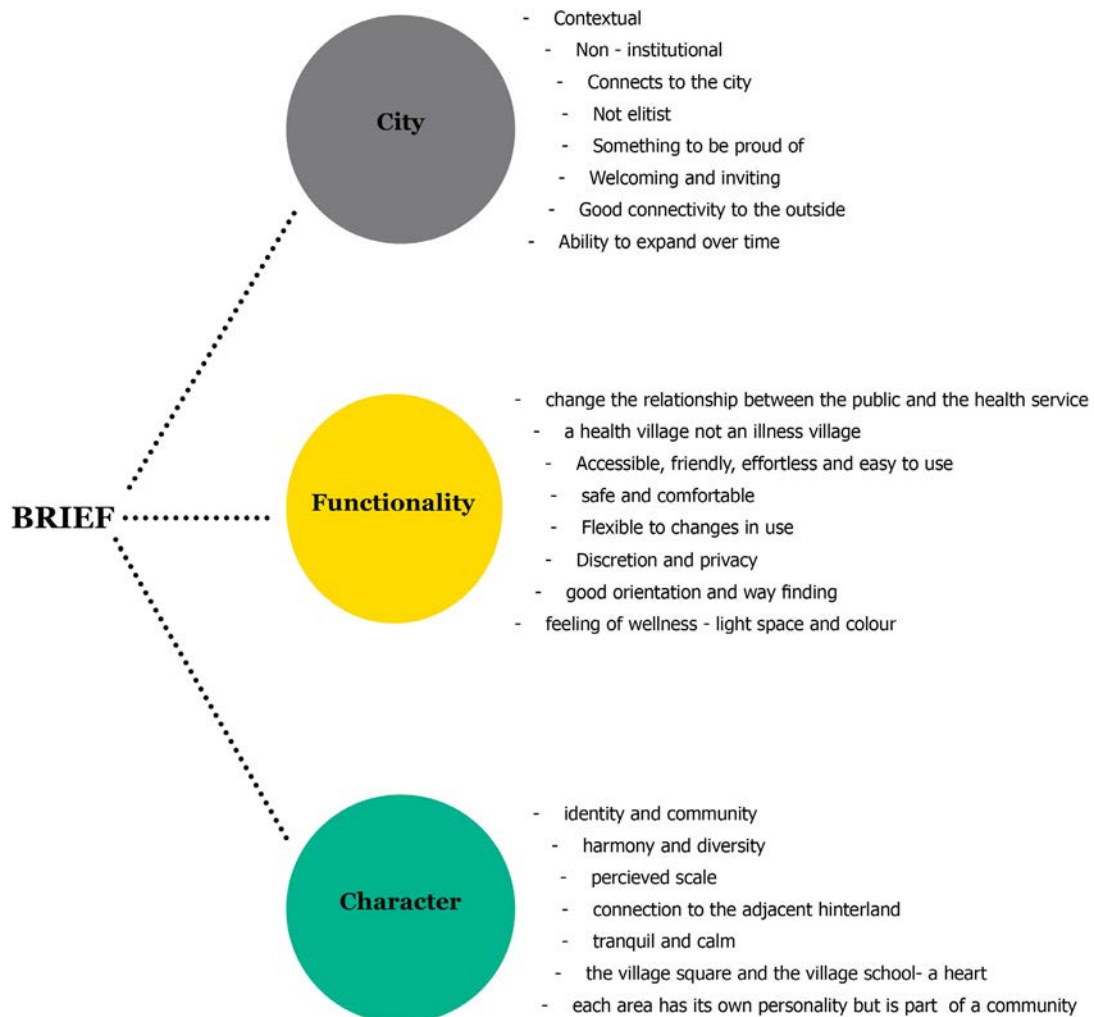
Aberdeen Community Health and Care Village has been described variously as a treatment and diagnostic centre or a “community hospital without beds”. It was commissioned by NHS Grampian in 2004 to bring together a number of services located in disparate sites across Aberdeen to one convenient location. Key to the delivery of the project have been the themes of clarity of purpose, consultation and collaboration.

As the project was in early stages of development NHS Grampian approached the then new entity of Architecture and Design Scotland who ran two workshops with the client. The result was a short brief outlining the vision for the project under the succinct headings of City, Functionality and Character.

This document also outlined the new working title for the project as the Aberdeen Community Health and Care Village. The choice to veer away from the terms health centre or community hospital has had far reaching implications in terms of the design which can still be felt in the articulation of the finished facility.

*“The services are together because they’re a resource for the city, we felt that the word hospital was not going to be the right thing, and in a village, you have a community of people who have to learn to live together, to live alongside one another, to communicate where it’s appropriate, to get to know one another and to become a cohesive entity. We were creating this community in the middle of the city which would serve the whole city and try to get people to engage in a slightly different way.”*

**Jackie Bremner, NHS Grampian**



The diagram above outlines the initial vision for the project.



jmarchitects were appointed to work on the project as the client felt they had strongly responded to the brief at interview exploring the village concept in an indepth way. The project started as a capital funded project with jmarchitects appointed as part of a contractor led team, but when it was decided that community projects of this nature would be part of the hub procurement and be revenue funded jmarchitects were subsequently appointed by Hub North.

*“Although we were initially bidding for this appointment with a contractor, the aspiration of NHS Grampian was clear at the outset. A ‘Village’ which broke down traditional barriers and promoted wellness. A ‘Village’ within a City - an intriguing architectural challenge”*

**Peter McCormick, jmarchitects**

Consultation helped to inform the location of the service. NHS Grampian consulted 150 service users across the various services that were to be co-located, confirming that it would be best for the service to have adequate car parking but also to be easily accessible by public transport, using only one bus, which for Aberdeen meant a city centre location. The long narrow site between Frederick Street and East North street was secured through collaboration with Aberdeen City Council thanks to an agreement between the two agencies to establish “market value” and conclude an off-market deal.

The site was formerly a council car park but also incorporated a B listed former granary building. A further plot across the road on Frederick Street was incorporated and developed as a multi-storey car park, it was part of the agreement that NHS Grampian would pay part cash for the land and provide the carpark which is owned and run by the council.

Co-locating the disparate services of outpatients, dental, sexual health, radiology, podiatry, physiotherapy, dietetics, speech therapy and minor surgery from various locations across Aberdeen, as well as amalgamating two or three instances of some services into one department was a challenge the client faced head on. There was extensive consultation with all of the services across the city.

*“We started off with just discussions with the senior management team, and then we rolled it out to uni-disciplinary meetings to get a sort of sounding, and then we rolled that out to multi-professional meetings, but in all of these we had public as well, so all the groups, all meetings we had had public reps on them, and we had two public reps on our project board as well, and they were with us from the beginning to the end so that we made sure that everything that we did, that there was public representatives there on our coat tails, making sure that we’d done everything we should have done in terms of testing.”*

**Jackie Bremner, NHS Grampian.**





Looking over the cafe area showing the first floor corridor often used for music performances

In the development there was also collaboration with the police who manage a forensic examination suite located on the site, which has access to doctors working on site if required. The granary building is currently undeveloped and has been secured until funding is available for the facility to expand. It is currently earmarked for further collaboration between NHS Grampian and Aberdeen City Council social work department.

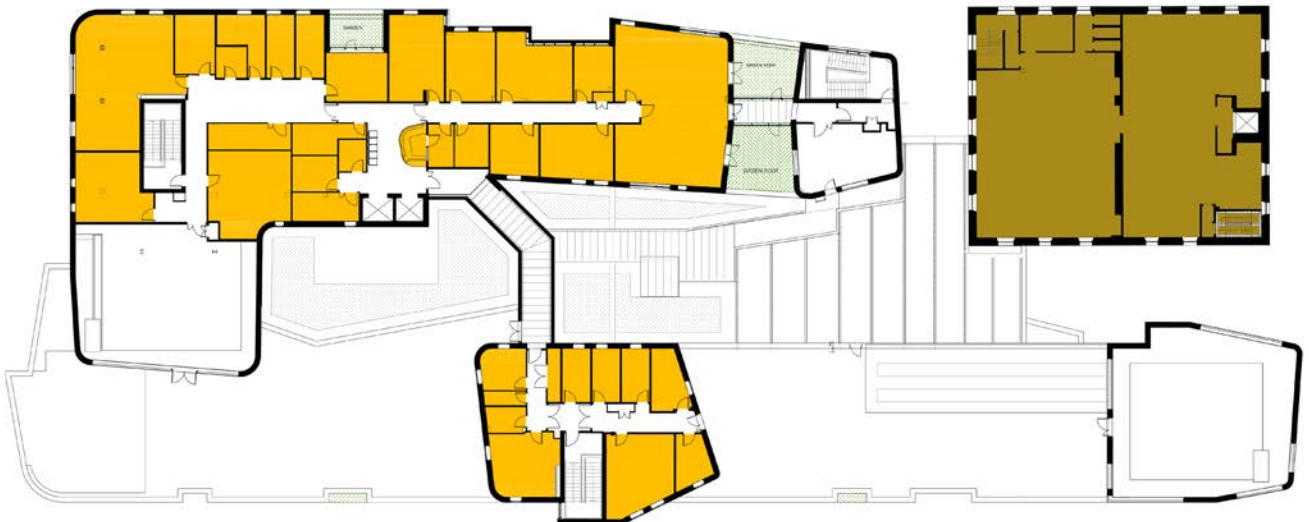




Ground Floor Plan



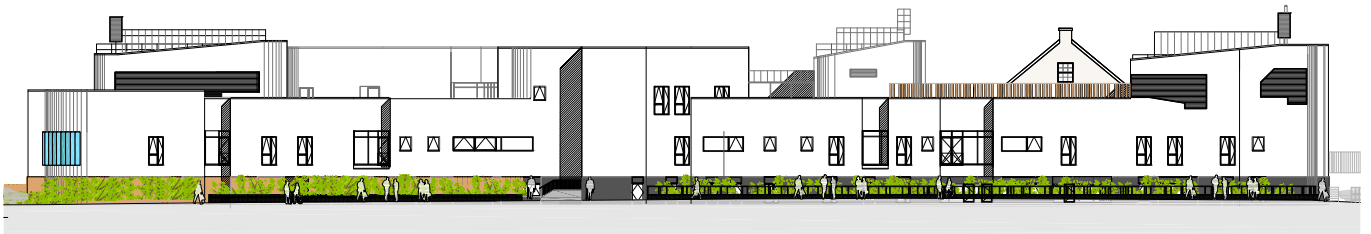
First Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan

 SEXUAL HEALTH	 RADIOLOGY	 DIETETICS/ SALT	 PUBLIC SHARED
 OLD GRANARY	 PHYSIOTHERAPY	 PODIATRY	 COUNCIL RESOURCE/ HEALTH INFORMATION
 OUTPATIENTS	 MINOR SURGERY	 ADMINISTRATION/ STAFF AREAS	 CAFE
 RECEIPT/ DESPATCH	 DENTISTRY	 RECEPTION AREAS (SHARED)	

**key to plans**



**Elevation to East North Street**



**Elevation to Frederick Street**





**Facade on Frederick Street, with the new carpark facility opposite**

## **Experience**

The primary entrance to the building from Frederick Street is not immediately obvious to pedestrians but quite clear from the parking area opposite. The entrance comprises the glazed area which connects the old granary building and the new-build section of the project. The façade on Frederick Street is varied to tie in with the context of a street which contains an ornate old school building, traditional tenements and a converted cinema. The building varies from two to three storeys on this facade, with the bulk of the mass at either end. The façade is composed of grey brick to first floor level and crisp white render above. It is punctured with regular windows and small balcony areas reflecting the fenestration of the tenement flats and school building opposite.

In contrast the façade on East North street is more functional. The street is 1.5m higher than Frederick Street so the building appears sunken, with a half level of ground floor engineering brick visible at street level. The upper levels are again clad in render which due to heavy traffic is beginning to discolour. To make the most of south light penetrating the building the majority of this façade is two storeys with three storey elements in the centre and Eastern edge. Wayfinding to the entrance is less clear if you are travelling from the city centre, approaching as a pedestrian you must walk past the mass of the building to enter down what will eventually be a lane when the adjacent site is developed, into the secondary entrance at the rear of the granary. Once inside the building way finding is much more intuitive.

You immediately arrive into the "village square" - an atrium area flooded by natural light from the glazed ceiling and adjacent courtyard areas - which is immediately welcoming and bright even on a dull day. As a visitor you are met immediately by a pod shared by a meet and greet welcome desk and the café. The exposed stone wall of the granary building provides material variation and interest to the largely pale and white surroundings. While not clear from the exterior, once inside the building the village ethos becomes more apparent, with department areas functioning like separate streets with the village square, courtyards and circulation areas as the spaces in between.

A patient arriving is directed discreetly to a colour-coded zone to attend their appointment, with the forms of the courtyards on both floors clearly directing patients either left or right. Subtle angles, curves and rounded edges to rooms gently nudge visitors in the right direction allowing glimpses to the next point along their journey. There are no sharp corners round which you must turn unsure of the eventual destination.



Travelling through the building to your appointment in any of the zones takes you through a procession from public, to semi public and private spaces. The waiting areas are all adjacent to the courtyard areas and benefit from natural light, but also have areas of screening to enable privacy if preferred. Between the village square and the waiting areas there are no barriers, no fire doors breaking up the flow between the spaces, or the connections between the departments for staff.

It is once a patient is called for their appointment that they travel through a door to a quiet departmental corridor then on to a bright naturally lit and ventilated consulting room. The room is functional with a brightly coloured panel lightening the mood while storage spaces are articulated by the medium to dark wood present throughout the building in the reception areas and doors.

Apart from the departments along the southern edge, which require mechanical ventilation as a result of traffic pollution, the remainder of the building is naturally ventilated and in all consulting rooms the windows can be opened. All consulting room windows have a view out to the surrounding environment which can be obscured by blinds for privacy if necessary. These were all conscious decisions by the architect to allow the environment to be controlled as much as possible by the occupant.

Another benefit of collaboration on the project with Aberdeen City Council is that the building is connected to the City Combined Heat and Power System which removed the need for boiler room facilities in the building and has the potential for cost savings in the future when the system moves to renewable fuel sources.

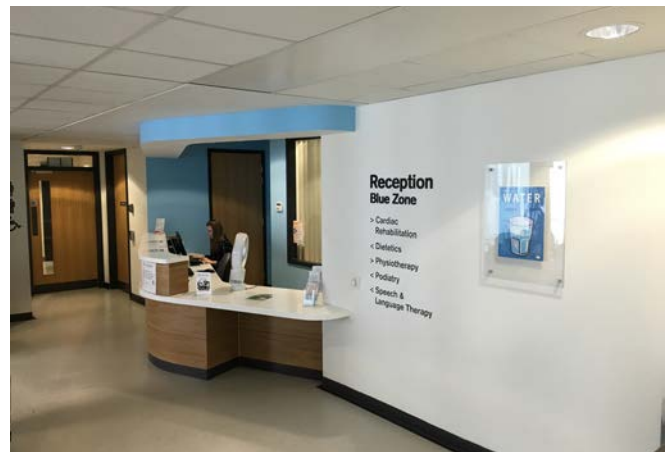
The top level is home to two distinct areas, the smaller of which is home to offices for speech and language therapy and dietetics. The larger area is primarily for staff, with integrated staff areas, but also home to office space and bookable meeting areas. The basement is home to parking spaces for use of the facility.

*“I often say we’re in this space in Aberdeen because it’s most convenient for patients, not staff, and it’s a balance, because you can’t have services without staff, but we are not here for the benefit of staff, we are here for the benefit of patients”*

***Sandy Reid, Senior Service Manager Aberdeen Health and Community Care Village***

## **Aberdeen Community Health and Care Village from East North Street**





**Interior spaces - clockwise from top left: the village square with colour coded signage; a consultation room; activity equipment at the entrance; a typical reception; and first floor**

## **Reaction**

The client group are pleased with the finished building, particularly the opportunities it has made for cross team and organisational collaboration. That three agencies have worked closely together to ensure the successful delivery of the building, not only developing relationships with regards to managing assets but also collaborating on service provision should have positive long term outcomes for Aberdeen as a whole.

Within the building the co-location of services affords the opportunity for staff to work better together. The management of the building have also been instrumental in bringing forward the initial aims of community integration and the entrance area hosts Aberdeen City Council exercise equipment while meeting spaces on the second floor are available to community groups free of charge, providing them with an easily accessible and affordable location in the city centre.



*“The café works very well for that because you and me have to queue in the same queue to get coffee and I’ve never seen you before, but, oh, you’re in sexual health, oh, I’m in podiatry, there’s not a kind of separate queue for different people, it’s only open at the same times for everybody. That definitely works”*

**Sandy Reid, Senior Service Manager Aberdeen Health and Community Care Village**

Clear and discreet wayfinding along with the muted colours have been a success. Since Relocation there has been a marked increase in the numbers of people accessing sexual health services, which could either be attributed to the accessible city centre location or the anonymity of accessing the services in a building that isn’t for the exclusive purpose.

The village square is an uplifting positive space providing a welcome to anyone who might be anxious about their visit. Another community aspect has been regular concerts delivered from a first floor corridor that looks over the café, allowing local music students performance space while lightening the mood for building users and visitors. While the Village square has been a great success unfortunately due to funding issues the “village green” has not yet been planted. An art strategy had been developed to enliven the courtyard areas with elements from the natural environment but donations to enable this have not been forthcoming. As a result the courtyard areas are highly visible, high profile areas that are incomplete and do not yet fulfil their intended role in this important public area.

*“The main element that hasn’t turned out as planned is the introduction of art in the facility. We commissioned an arts strategy, have a well developed arts plan including development of the three main courtyards, key to the creation of the ‘Village Square’. Unfortunately our fundraising efforts have not been as successful as we hoped and therefore only a small number of commissions have been installed to date”*

**Jackie Bremner, NHS Grampian**

Another issue that could have been better resolved is that the podiatry consulting rooms are quite a walk from the reception that was initially designated for them. As patients can’t always walk quickly for their appointments travel time was eating into their consultation time. As a result an ad-hoc podiatry waiting area composed of a few chairs in a corridor has sprung up half way along the route.

On the whole however the building provides: a bright, uplifting space and a convenient location in the centre of the city the design of which has been driven by a real clarity of purpose in terms of the Village name and the articulation of that; continuing collaboration between NHS Grampian, the Police and Aberdeen City Council has resulted in integrated services in an accessible location with shared parking and benefitting from a city wide combined heat and power system; and a comprehensive programme of consultation with staff at all levels and members of the public, along with regular articles in the local press have made the transition for everyone to the new building much easier.



A&DS would like to thank the following for their time and candour:

Jackie Bremner, NHS Grampian  
Sandy Reid, Senior Service Manager Aberdeen Health and Community Care Village  
Peter McCormick, jmarchitects

Images by Niall Hastie photographer

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