

Architecture &  
Design Scotland

Ailtearachd is Dealbhadh na h-Alba

# The Shields Centre

## A Case Study

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## Introduction

The Shields Centre, a new health and social care facility for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is, at 200 sqm, one of the smallest healthcare buildings recently procured through the Hub West Scotland process. However it is also significant in that it stretches and expands on the whole idea of what a 'health centre' embodies.

The new centre, which sits within the boundary of a conservation area in East Pollokshields in the South Side of Glasgow, on one level offers traditional medical services, providing two GP practices on the ground level of the two-storey building. On another more atypical level it also acts as something of a community hub for the local population, bringing together local social work services and health initiatives via a range of flexible accommodation - not to mention a therapeutic community garden. In bringing all these elements together the new centre is increasingly being recognised as an innovative care model with equality of access at its heart.

"It's fairly unique in terms of its (small) size and what it's trying to achieve," explains Derek Rae, Project Manager of Capital Planning & Procurement at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. "As is often the case, the project started many years ago when there was a joint needs assessment carried out in East Pollokshields involving Glasgow City Council and the NHS in conjunction with the local community. From an overall health perspective the main need that emerged was for a modern health building."





Ground floor layout housing the two GP services.

### Design Challenge

“Three or four GP practices historically operated from East Pollokshields, virtually all of them based in very poor tenement buildings. So the main part of our initial planning was to provide accommodation for GP practices,” says Rae. “There was also a Social Work building adjacent to the new centre. It was a dilapidated two storey block, built back in the seventies that was badly in need of replacement, so early on it was agreed that this would be demolished and the staff and this pre-existent service would move into the new centre.”

“Another facility that the Community Health Partnership operated was called the ‘Health Shop’. This was a shop front in

East Pollokshields, mainly concerned with promoting health improvement activity, but it was also very much a drop-in centre for local people. Different health professionals would come in on a sessional basis and deliver services, but being a shop front obviously meant it was limited in what they could do. So this provision was planned into the design brief.”

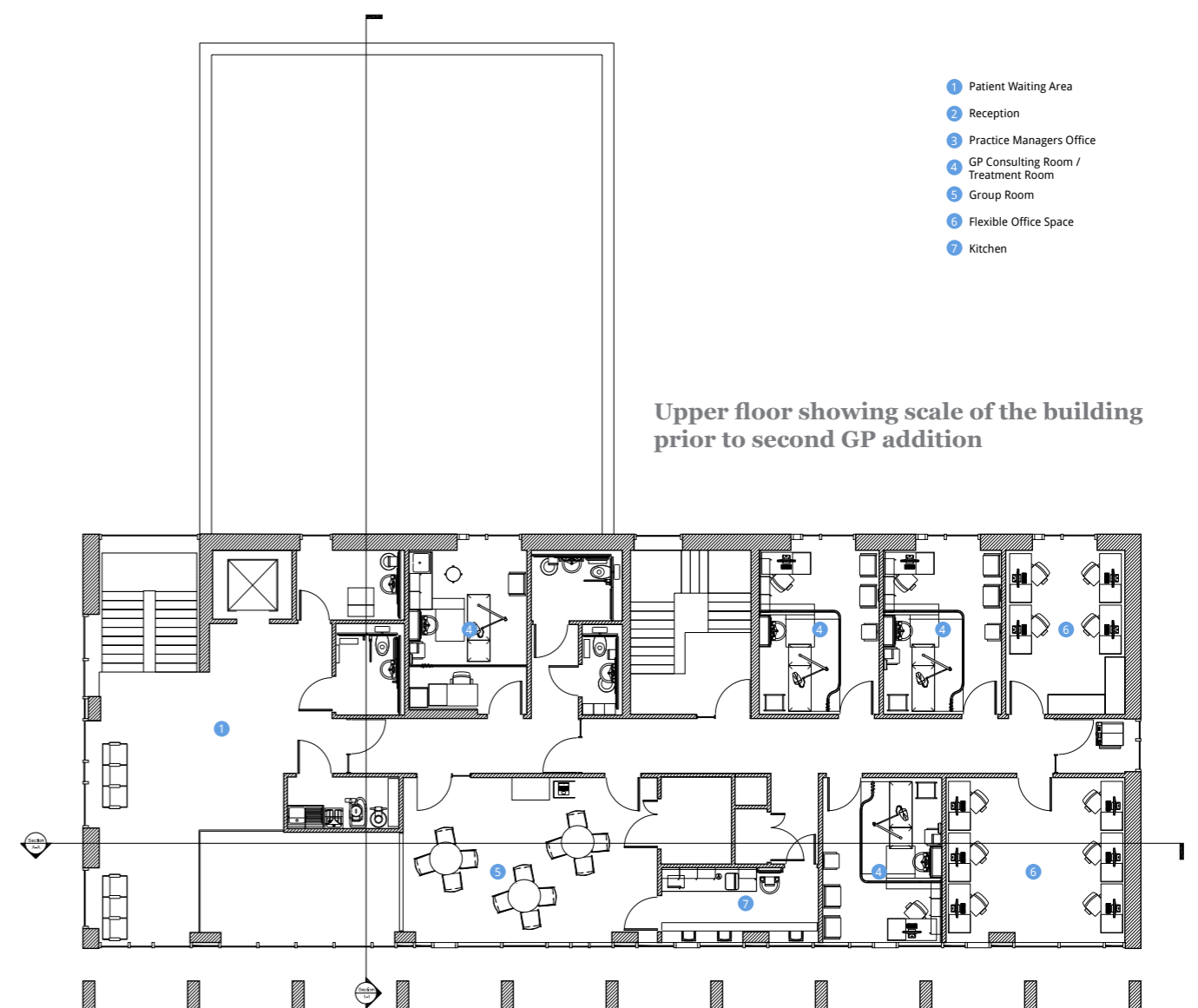
Beyond these services, the building would also seek to meet the needs of many other services including specialist childcare, addictions staff and primary care mental health. In other words integration as well as flexibility were key.

### Consultation and Brief

An extensive period of consultation with various stakeholder groups, including local GP’s, took place over a five-year period. “We had a lot of input from the community right from the start,” explains Derek Rae. “We worked with the Community Health Partnership as it was then (it is now HSPC – Health and Social Care Partnerships). Their Community Engagement Officer, Lisa Martin, had an established network of contacts with different community groups, both statutory and voluntary groups, and also the Community Council. Lisa was responsible for interacting with the community, consulting

with them about the full range of activities of the Community Health Partnership. We then mapped out a Community Engagement Programme to involve the local community.”

“We also had a couple of community representatives on both our Project Board and Delivery Group, making sure that we used the output from the consultations to influence the design,” says Rae. “We had an idea of what we wanted to provide, and we wanted to share that vision with local people and allow them to influence the way that they would use the building, and what they think would help encourage people to come to the building.”



Upper floor showing scale of the building prior to second GP addition



Patient reception and waiting area

## Procurement and Tender

In terms of procurement, although the project would be delivered through the Scottish Government's Hub delivery vehicle process, it would not be based on the revenue-funding model that health centres generally adhere to. "The contract would be carried out as a more traditional design and build capital scheme, allowing for quite a bit more flexibility, which the DBFM (Design Build Finance and Maintain) schemes tend not to have," explains Derek Rae.

Following an invited tendering process, Glasgow based Anderson Bell Christie Architects were appointed to design the new centre with CBC Construction as main contractor.



GP treatment room



## Building Plan and Design

Essentially, the new Shields Centre features a street facing two-storey curtain walled building set behind a double height buff brick colonnade. Internally, two GP practices as well as a main reception area occupy the ground floor. A range of consulting rooms and group spaces accommodating a range of community health and welfare services are arranged across the first floor level.

“The building was seen as a focus for community engagement,” explains Jonathan McQuillan, an Associate at Anderson Bell Christie and the Shields Centre Project Architect. “A large part of the briefing element was a response to the local BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) community, who account for almost 48% of the local population. The NHS was keen to ensure a high level of engagement with the community and a good uptake of services provided.”

“Another key part of the brief was to avoid any ‘institutional’ feel to the building,” explains McQuillan. “We wanted to create a more ‘homely’ or intimate feel overall, with the scale reflecting the surrounding sandstone tenements. Originally we wanted to match the response to the three storey tenements buildings but the programme of the building didn’t merit going up to three floors.”

As well as the building’s scale its material palette has also been carefully devised to assuage any overtly institutional feel to the building. “The materials are predetermined in some sense by the locality,” explains McQuillan. “The majority of the tenements in the area are all buff sandstone as is the adjacent community centre and new school, so it seemed natural to try and bind them together in some way. We knew that we probably weren’t able to afford sandstone so we chose a buff brick in a colour that that blends in.”

Central to the design concept and important in terms of creating a more user friendly, approachable building, is the entrance. “The entrance is key,” explains McQuillan. “We placed it to the side of the building to create an oblique entrance, the idea being that the visitor filters in through the colonnade and then you’ve got a softer approach to the building. We wanted to make the entrance as legible as possible, therefore as soon as you come through the front door, the first thing that you see ahead of you is the Wayfinder’s desk at the reception. So you know exactly where your first port of call should be.”

“But equally, the open plan arrangement means that as soon as you come through the front door you can see each of the doors to the GP practices along the building, as well as looking through to the community garden. The upper floor, with the various consulting and group meeting areas can also be seen. So, as you come in the front door you know exactly what your options are, where you should go and how you should get there.”

The internal layout had been the subject of some lengthy design discussions. “There was some debate about the internal arrangements,” explains Derek Rae. “As the GP practices have the biggest footfall in a health centre situation, and as many GP visitors are elderly and infirm or young mothers with buggies, there’s lots of reasons why you would locate them on the ground floor. This is slightly unusual as many new health centres are putting GP’s on the first floor - which is about trying to get them away from the main activity around people entering into the building and giving them a bit of space, a bit of quiet. So we had to absolutely make sure that our access arrangements and the relationship with the ground floor GP accommodation was as good as it possibly could be.”

## Increased scope of contract during design stage

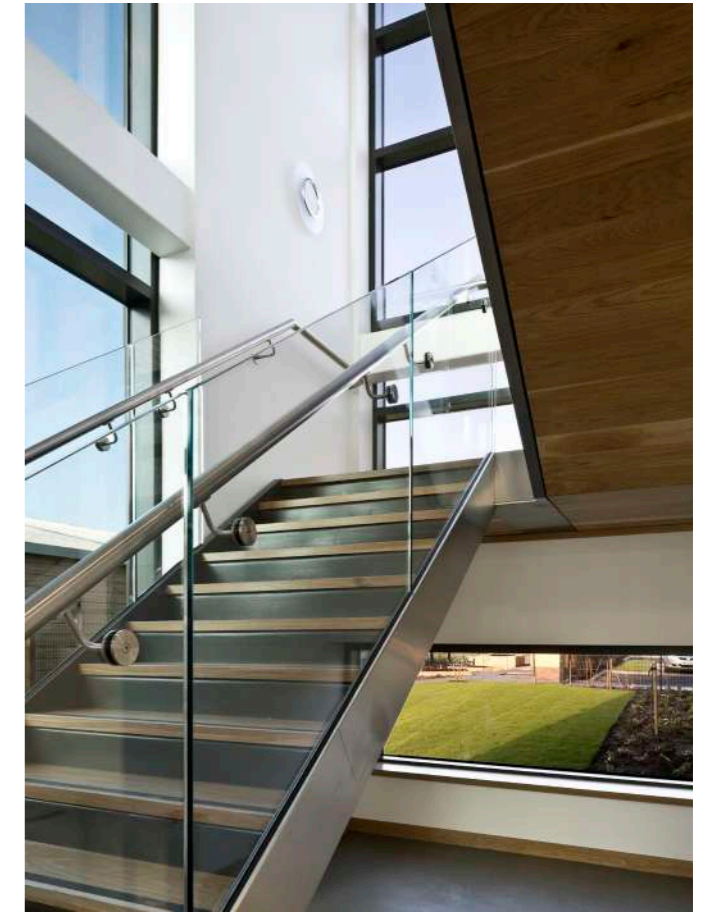
The scope of the original brief changed during the design process, when a second GP practice requested accommodation in the new centre. "The plot of land we bought was big enough to allow for some future expansion, it's just that the future expansion came along very quickly!" says Derek Rae.

Effectively this meant that the plan changed from a simple rectangular two-storey arrangement with the original GP practice on ground level and Social Work, Community Health Partnership accommodation above, to an L Shaped plan on ground level, with a new extension to the back of the building supporting the additional GP practice.

The car park has also been located to the rear of the new centre. "It's a civic building so it's important to have a civic presence. As a result the decision was made to locate the car park to the rear," explains McQuillan. "With a building that has a civic presence, the question then is 'how do you achieve privacy at the same time?' Most of the buildings in the area are pretty much hard up on the heel of the kerb. So what we did is create a colonnade that's right up to the kerb but the main body of the glazed curtain walled building steps back which allows a buffer zone for a bit of privacy to the GP rooms. This forms a visual distraction between people passing on the pavement and the GPs in their room, and also means that there is less reliance on keeping blinds closed all the time."

A further "buffer" has also been created via a series of thin Cor-ten fins designed by Alexander Hamilton, a botanical artist who helped drive the arts approach throughout the building. The screens, with botanical designs devised by the artist following a series of workshops held with local school children and community groups, are laid out in such a way that when approached in different directions, they join up to create one screen rather than just a series of slats. This soft and context sensitive approach has been extremely successful in creating an extra layer of privacy for the GP's.

Hamilton's botanical designs have also been etched into many of the external and internal glazed elements. These provide an extra textural layer to the building as well as allowing softer, more diffuse light to enter and permeate the interior spaces, particularly in the double height reception area. It's a device that creates an airy welcoming quality once inside the building.



## Building Performance

In terms of the building's performance, the glazed curtain walling and single ply membrane roof featuring an array of PV panels contribute to the energy efficiency of the building, achieving a BREEAM Excellent rating. "As the building is very well insulated and has a high level of air tightness, the main issue that you tend to come up against is overheating. So on this project we ran a number of thermal models looking at the provision of natural ventilation without creating a demand for mechanical cooling. This building is all naturally ventilated."

"With the curtain walling we also considered the glass specification. The thermal model suggested a particular transmittance value that we then upgraded. So there is an enhancement on top of what the baseline requirement would have been for this building in order to control thermal comfort. The colonnade on the south elevation is also useful because there's an overhang that further contributes to solar control and thermal comfort. The colonnade is not just a design feature, it's linked into privacy and the sustainability strategy as well."

## Community Garden

One of the major assets of the Shields Centre experience, and one that has been particularly popular with its users in terms of health and wellbeing potential, is the small community garden created behind the entrance. Initially seen as a green "buffer zone" and shared space between the new centre and adjacent Community Centre, the initiative has since "grown arms and legs", according to Jonathan McQuillan.

"There's a huge interest in community gardens at the moment. Before designing the Shields Centre, I was involved in designing a housing project for Govan Housing Association that included allotments. We suggested running the scheme as community gardens, where a trust is set up and the scheme is self-run. It's been hugely successful, so basically we took all of the experience and learning from this project and applied it to the Shields Centre."



Buff brick addresses neighboring tenement buildings

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“As part of the arts package we tendered for a charitable group to take on the garden role. We felt that in order for the garden to work it needed a third party to manage it. If it had been part of the general maintenance of the building it would have been quite a low-key affair. The involvement of Urban Roots, a Glasgow based and community led collective who maintain it and drive its the function, has maximised its potential.”

The community garden is divided into a quiet space open to all, and a teaching allotment with raised beds for food growing and borders planted with therapeutic herbs – many of which are echoed in the integrated Cor-ten and glass throughout the building. Fruit trees and bushes have also been planted around the grounds with a wall of climbing plants and trellis, apple trees and a garden in front of consulting room windows.

Initially a seed fund kickstarted the project and then afterwards Urban Roots were encouraged to seek more funding to keep the project moving. To date they have met

with a great deal of success. Indeed plans are currently afoot to re-landscape the green corner plot at the building’s street entrance, as well as building a new multi-use gardening shed which will not only offer Urban Roots staff some shelter but there are plans to hold cooking demonstrations using produce from the garden.

The garden has evolved into an important part of the centre, as a community teaching resource and as a rehabilitation tool, featuring as part of treatment plans for some of the centre’s patients. “The GPs and also other services that use the building refer patients to Urban Roots to get involved in the garden either on a one-to-one basis or as part of the already established groups,” explains Derek Rae.



## Final Impressions

The Shields Centre Practice Manager Linda Edgar agrees that the garden has had a palpably positive impact on patients and the wider community. "Both patients and staff use the garden a lot, we sometimes hold our meetings there in the summer. It definitely lifts stress levels and I think it has a real therapeutic effect. The Urban Roots staff are so enthusiastic and it's been so beneficial to many of our patients who have been involved in the gardening sessions. Some of our visitors have even gone home with a bag of potatoes or vegetables in season from the garden, which has been brilliant! It's also

used by school children and play groups, so it's good to see everyone in the community getting involved."

In addition to the success of the garden, Linda Edgar also singles out the reception area as working particularly well since the opening of the building in 2015. "It's a lovely, big bright waiting area, very inviting for patients. Also, unlike the previous older health centre that I worked in there are no high desks with glass to sit behind. It's an open reception area which creates a friendlier atmosphere, taking away the feeling of 'them and us' between the staff and patients."

This "friendlier atmosphere" is a view very much echoed by architect Jonathan McQuillan. "There is a real visibility and legibility between the main spaces in the building. In fact we had a group of visitors over from Norway, they were architects on a tour of health centres in Scotland. When they were sitting in the upstairs waiting room, one of the visitors commented that what he really liked about the waiting spaces was that you had light coming in from five different sources. You've got light from above, below and then three walls. Light pouring in from all these different directions makes it quite a special space."

***"Ultimately, the Shields Centre sends out a strong message of integrating health and wellbeing in its form and function," concludes McQuillan. "And that's what we set out to achieve."***



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

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