

Lawson Memorial Hospital, Golspie – Greenspace Case Study



Background

The Scottish Government's "Health Promoting Health Services"¹ and the "Good Places, Better Health"² framework recognise that poor environments may foster hopelessness and stress and discourage healthy behaviour, and the creation of positive physical environments may nurture better health and well-being. Furthermore, recent research³ has shown that improvements in the quality of greenspace can also decrease health inequalities. In the Highlands, engagement in pilot programmes in woodland settings has been shown to result in increases in physical activity and well-being. These studies led Forestry Commission Scotland, in partnership with NHS Highland, to engage in a project which would explore the potential for health promoting improvements to hospital greenspace to be carried out in the Highlands. This project is now entering its third phase.

Phase 1

A survey of 133 health facilities was carried out. This began as a desktop exercise which scored the facilities according to site characteristics: space within the site which had the potential for greenspace development, feasibility, legal constraints, development plans in place or plans for closure, potential health benefits which took account of the patient profile and patient numbers, and the level of deprivation in the surrounding local community. This reduced the number to 15 facilities. Each of these was visited to ground proof desktop exercise and to assess the willingness of the facilities and their communities to be part of Phase 2.

This resulted in the identification of the Lawson Memorial Hospital as the site in the Highlands where the greening of hospital space should be piloted. The clear ambition of the local community to engage and the presence of a site which had a high potential for greenspace improvement was important in the selection process.

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Phase 2

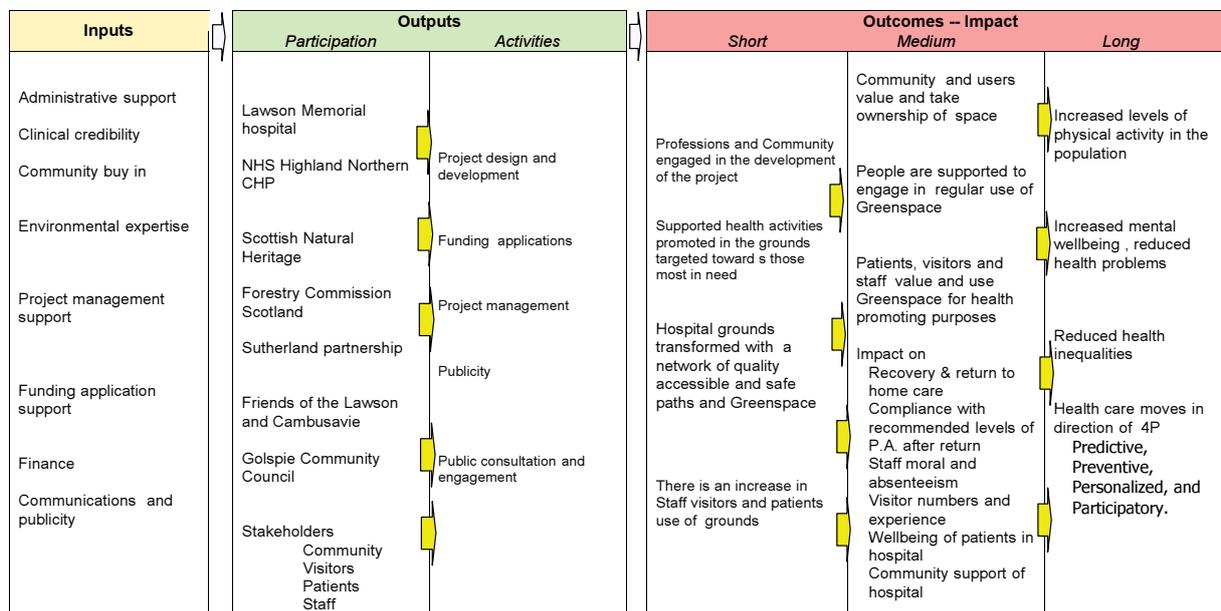
The Lawson Memorial Hospital Greenspace Project was set up to pilot a process of creating health benefits by improving the environment around healthcare facilities.

How these outcomes may be achieved through this project is illustrated in the logic model below.

Pivotal to this project is the assumption that resulting health benefits will be upmost if stakeholder engagement in the whole project is greatest and where the improvements fit the purpose of increasing use of the hospital grounds for physical activity, recreation, recuperation and relaxation.

Program: Lawson Memorial Greenspace Project Logic Model

Situation: Improving the grounds around the Lawson Memorial hospital will create health benefits for patients visitors staff and the supporting community.



Assumptions

Community involvement in the creation of Greenspace will lead to higher participation in Greenspace
Improved Greenspace will lead to improved wellbeing of staff visitors and patients
Targeted interventions can reduce inequalities

External Factors

Working practice/ lifestyle choices e.g. car use and fear act as barriers preventing uptake of increased opportunities

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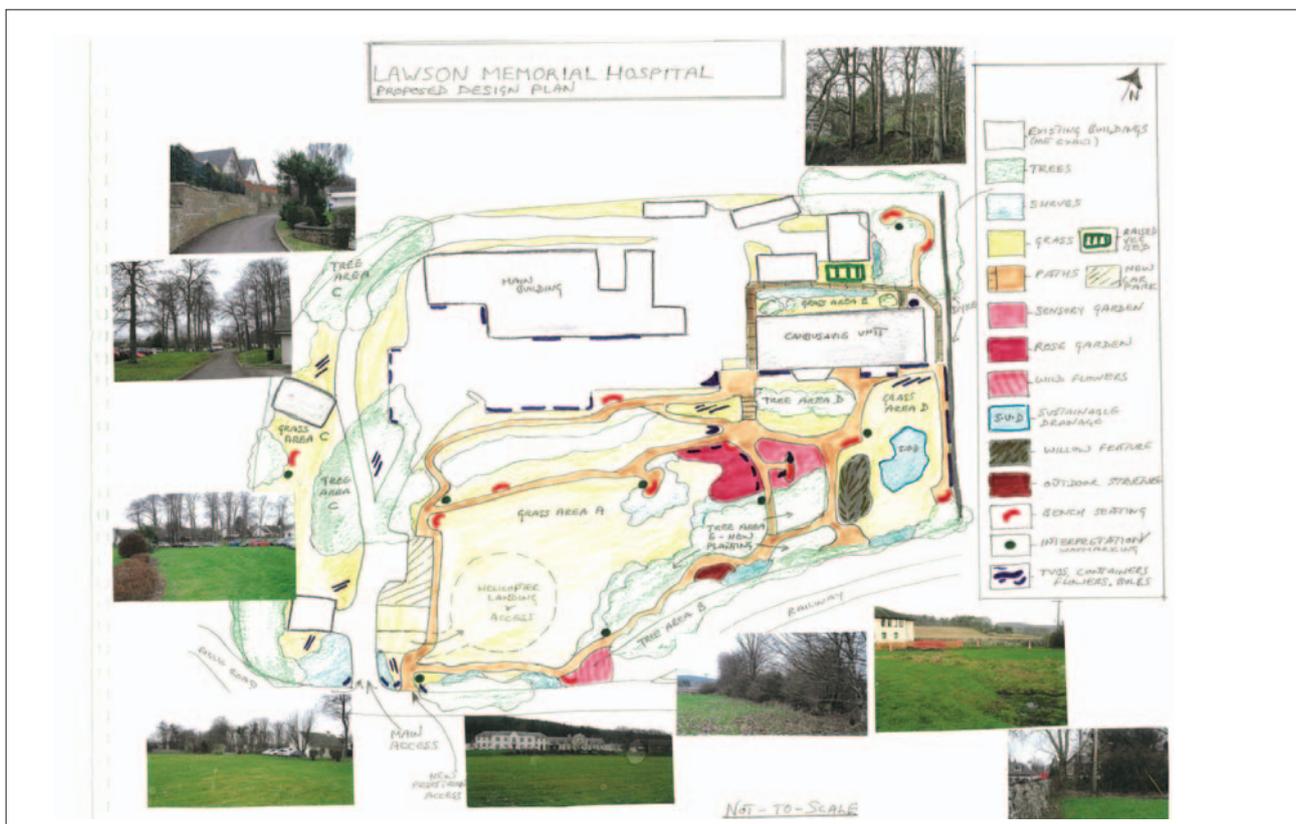
Community engagement

At the outset a steering committee was established which included; representatives of the agencies supporting the project; NHS Highland, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage; representatives of the hospital, including management, staff and friends; and representatives of the wider community of Golspie and Sutherland. The remit of this committee was to take ownership and manage the project. A questionnaire was sent out to the potential users and beneficiaries of the project e.g. those working, staying or visiting the hospital; the local community; the wider catchment area of the hospital to assess the support for the project and what improvements should be included in the design. In addition support was sought from local affiliated groups and organisations.

Greenspace design

The consultation identified the desire for: safe access; all abilities paths; seating; shelter; sensory stimulus; and made specific mention of trees, flowers and wildlife. It identified overwhelming support from all stakeholder groups and the espoused intention to make greater use of the space. This report and a scoping exercise was carried out by the Forestry Commission Scotland landscape design forester and was given to a forestry consultant to develop a design which would meet the requirements specified in the report.

The resulting design was then sent out for consultation to the steering committee and affiliated groups and organisations and amendments made to produce the final design brief.



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Project implementation

Two select groups were set up. The first to source funds for the project and the second to manage the process of putting the project out to tender, each of these was led by community representatives, advised by professional colleagues.

Concluding remarks and future plans

Bringing health benefits by the improvement of hospital greenspace can be achieved by communities with the support of agencies bringing necessary professional understanding and expertise. There are considerable advantages in adopting this approach: firstly community ownership of the project permits access to funding streams inaccessible to statutory bodies; secondly it engages the community in exploring how developing accessible Greenspace creates opportunities which positively improve health and wellbeing, an exploration which can encompass ideas beyond the original project; thirdly it ensures that the changes proposed are those identified as desirable by the community and most likely to lead to increased engagement and participation; fourthly in passing ownership of the project to the community it demands they take responsibility and make provision for future sustainability.

The approach however is not without its problems and pitfalls: communities lack experience and confidence in their ability to develop and manage such a project and will be cautious about adopting long term maintenance commitments. The role of Forestry Commission Scotland and other professional agencies is pivotal to the success of the partnership: in building confidence and belief in the worth of the project; providing expert and administrative support; and providing a route map and appropriate tools for the development and management of the project.

The resulting partnership is likely to result in a design which is wanted, needed, fit for purpose, that will be used and maintained.

References

1. "Health Promoting Health Services"
<http://www.healthscotland.com/uploads/documents/4576hphs%230intro.pdf>.;2.
2. "Good Places Better Health"
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/254447/0075343.pdf>
3. Mitchell R, Popham F. Effects of exposure to natural environments on health inequalities: an observational population study. *The Lancet* , Vol 372, Issue 9650, Pages 1655-1660, 8 November 2008.

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