



The Helston Gateway Project

Health and Wellbeing Capacity delivered in the Community, by the Community

Key Deliverables:

- Using empty retail premises to bring healthcare and wellbeing to the heart of the town. Medical, social prescribing, mental and physical health support, youth services and community space in a single, purpose-designed building refurbishment. An exemplar for integrating health services into local high streets and combining this provision with wider facilities for the community.
- The capital project completed on time (13 months) within a £3.6M budget compared with independent benchmark costing which forecast £6.0M. The lease cost for the GP Surgery achieved £26/sqft compared with an NHS benchmark of £40/sqft.
- A community-led project created through local Place Shaping, managed as a not-for-profit community asset by local people, delivering to community need. Unlocked by Cornwall Council support through Shared Prosperity and Town Centre Revitalisation funding.
- Innovative GP Surgery design supports the needs of an expanding local population, is equipped for healthcare staff training and includes a capability for outpatient treatment relieving pressure on Cornwall's only major hospital.
- The lease income from the GP Surgery is applied to sustain the co-located not-for-profit community and youth services ensuring that NHS rental payments are recycled to provide broader wellbeing benefit. The arrangement gives the ability to cross-refer between health, wellbeing and community services all operating from the same building.
- Innovative design re-purposes a derelict 1980's supermarket into a carbon 'net zero' building, a notable innovation in sustainable construction. The project has been delivered by local people for local people, with the capital spend supporting the area's tradespeople, and procured through management contracting at 60% of the benchmark capital cost.
- Repurposing a substantial, derelict town centre building breathes new life into a declining rural market town, giving residents a reason to use their town centre and reversing footfall decline.



Project Summary



Overview

The Helston Gateway project is a £3.6M community-led project to acquire and refurbish a large, derelict, town centre supermarket building to create much-needed facilities for a struggling rural market town. Unoccupied for over 7 years, the building's state of disrepair was a source of tremendous anger for residents. It created a sense of dereliction and despair in the heart of our community, engendering a lack of pride and dissuading visitors from the town centre.

Supported by Cornwall Council and with UK Shared Prosperity Funding plus additional match funding, local community group South Kerrier Alliance CIC has been able to acquire and refurbish the derelict building to create a large, new GP surgery alongside community space. The GP surgery is the anchor tenant with this rental income supporting broader community facilities in the lower ground floor and ensuring the sustainability of this not-for-profit community asset.

The lower ground floor community facilities are designed for families and young people, centred around the need to provide expansion space for the town's youth café, allied with physical activity space: café, indoor and outdoor activities including climbing and bouldering, skating, skateboarding, parkour, events space for music and band practice and a music studio. Partner, community led youth support organisations are co-located, enabling them to work with families and young people in a place where they want to congregate.

Investment Justification



Helston has the worst 'Community Needs Index' of any town in Cornwall – 71% worse than the England average and 51% lower than the Cornwall average based on latest OCSI analysis published December 2024.

The town also has the highest proportion of young people (age 0-15) of any town in Cornwall, 10.02% above national average and 25.35% above Cornwall's average. Helston serves its large population of young people particularly badly.

With an area population of 34,070, of which 12,265 are residents of Helston town, this is a predominantly rural area, characterised by small hamlets and villages lacking connection to the rest of Cornwall, creating significant difficulties of isolation and poor economics.

Having achieved significant expansion through edge-of-town housing developments, facilities within Helston (doctors, dentists, community and youth services) have not kept pace with population expansion. It is easier for this peripheral population to drive to out-of-

town facilities rather than use their town centre, leading to traffic dominance, footfall decline and rising numbers of vacant premises.

Helston's public sector funding per head of population (2015 to 2023) was £16.45 compared with the Cornwall average of £871.58 per head for the Duchy's 11 largest towns. Helston ranks the worst funded out of all of the major Cornish towns by a significant margin.

Across the area there has been a general depopulation in people who are of 'working age' and gains in those who are in their early 70s. People over the age of 65 have increased in number by over 20%, increasing pressure on health services, whilst Helston North saw a fall in 25 to 49-year-olds of almost 15%. Young adults are significant in depopulation with falls in the region of 12-13% estimated, moving elsewhere for education and employment.

Sources: Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI), Local Insights, Cornwall Council CAP Data & Freedom of Information Requests.

Project Details

Through a consultative Place Shaping process, the community defined the need for services to be located in the centre of Helston. Feedback from consultations highlighted the need to address under-resourced healthcare capacity, to attract and retain young people and to provide community space, all key to arresting decline of the town centre.

The Helston Gateway concept was developed to achieve multiple outcomes: utilise empty retail space to create a services centre, enhancing community access, fostering local business growth and creating inclusive spaces whilst delivering net-zero carbon performance.

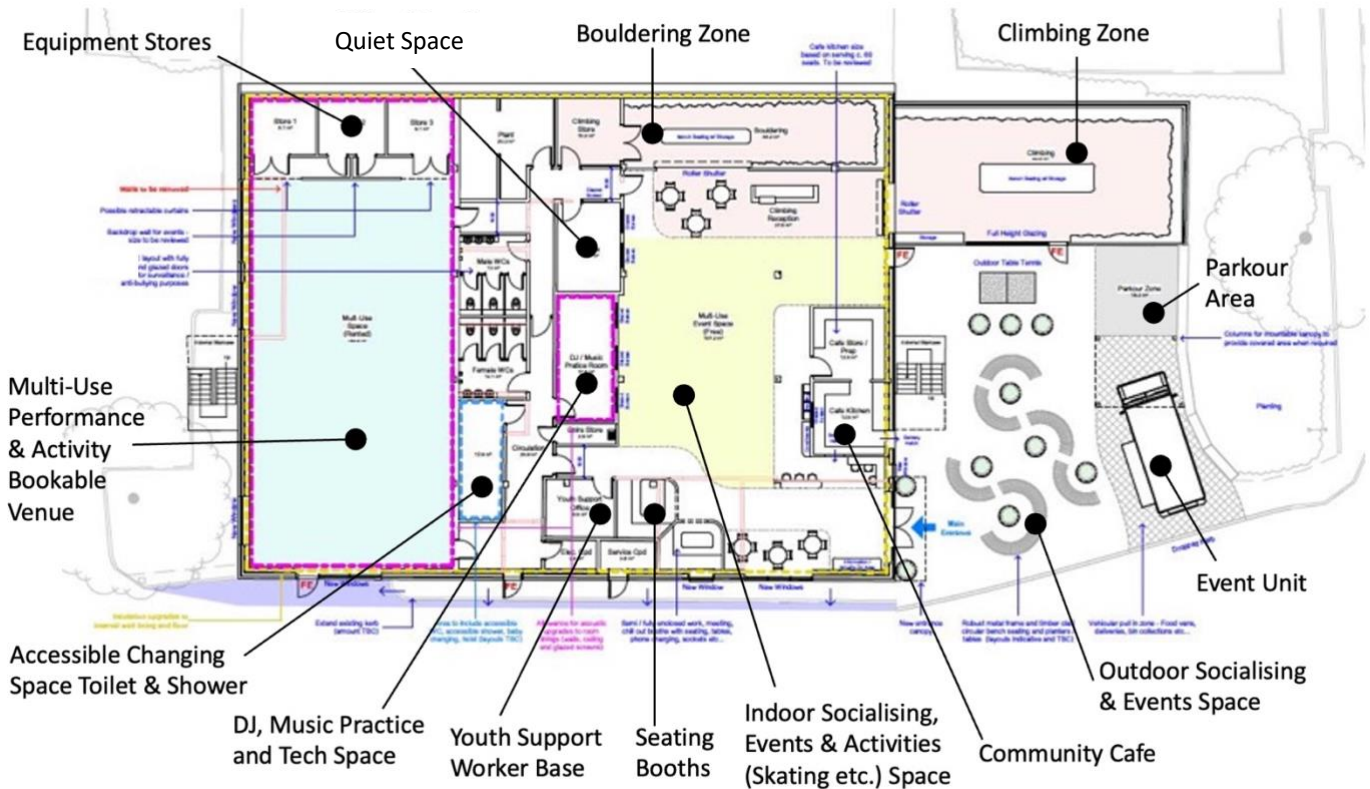
Under community ownership, the building operates on a not-for-profit basis, with all income recycled to support the sustainability of the community space.

Phase 1 - Upper Ground Floor

Covering approximately three-quarters of the original supermarket retail floorspace, the building now provides a new, purpose-built GP Surgery incorporating 19 consulting and treatment rooms plus related ancillary support services. Designed to the latest health standards, the new surgery is managed by the existing Helston Medical Centre team and increases local medical capacity by around 65%.

The GP facility provides expansion capacity, staff training facilities and outpatient treatment rooms. Building design is based on key flexible principles which allow the practice to adapt their layout and rooms based on changing needs and horizon medical technologies. It includes consultation rooms for outpatient appointments, alleviating the need for people to travel an hour or more to the Duchy's main hospital.

Activity, social and youth support facilities



The project demonstrates that a sustainable, community ownership model can deliver essential community services and revitalise a neglected rural area.

Financial Headlines

Building area 2,035sqm of which 1,199sqm is GP Surgery and 836sqm is community activity space

Construction Costs	Out-turn		Benchmark	
	£	£/m2	£	£/m2
Whole Building	3,066,313	1,507	5,672,383	2,787
GP Surgery	2,060,838	1,719	2,398,000 to 3,597,000	2,000 to 3,000
Rental Costs PA	£	£/m2	£	£/m2
GP Surgery	168,000	25.67	196,000 to 327,200	30.00 to 50.00

Impact

Adjacent to a main town centre car park, which is the prime access point used by residents and visitors to Helston town centre, the once run-down area gave an extremely disappointing and negative impression of the town and was increasingly the centre of anti-social behaviour. Its state of dereliction in such a prominent location made it of huge importance to the community.

The impact of regenerating this area is significant. Not only does it address Helston and The Lizard's dire lack of community infrastructure, it also creates a Gateway to the town. Adjacent to the town's main shopping street the Helston Gateway project improves this downtrodden area and encourages more of the local and rural population to visit – a strong reason for residents and visitors to come to Helston town centre. 'Why would you come to Helston – there's nothing to do' was the most common response in resident surveys, especially from families and young people.

Importantly, the lower ground floor provides employment for members of the younger community, with 17 new jobs and 3 new 'start up' community businesses managing aspects of the activity provision eg. climbing, skating and café micro-businesses all based in the building. The café provides youth training opportunities and there is working space for youth support staff.

The refurbished space also provides activity space for the area's Youth Café. The existing Youth Café is located on the first floor of a terraced building and can host 45 young people per session. There are 5,758 children and young people (aged 0 to 15 years) in Helston and the Lizard Community Network Area. With the Youth Café oversubscribed, there is a clear need for expansion and huge demand for youth services.

To support the project, Cornwall Council have refurbished the adjacent 237 space town centre car park, helping to revitalise this gateway area to the town.

Once established the project will attract an estimated 29,100 visits p.a. of which 16,878 will be young people.

Project Outcomes

Specific outcomes flow from each area of the project. However, the benefits of each are enhanced by the integration with the other spaces: the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

- 65% increase in healthcare capacity to support the well-being of a growing, aging population as well as a general population increase in the area due to significant new housebuilding.
- The capital project completed on time within a £3.6M budget – compared with independent benchmark costing which forecast £6.0M (Ward Williams 2023)

- The lease cost for the GP Surgery achieved £26/sqft compared with an NHS benchmark of £40/sqft
- Supports NHS strategy to shift Royal Cornwall Hospital based outpatient settings to a more community-centred approach, delivering services locally
- Provides facilities to drive a shift in the narrative of healthcare to a more preventative, personalised and proactive agenda
- Purpose built and state of the art facilities promote the sustainability of the healthcare workforce - focusing on increased training and improved recruitment
- Provides facilities for community-based well-being organisations to work alongside clinical, social and activity-based services with capacity to address increasing mental health needs, particularly amongst the young
- Addresses Helston's dire Community Needs Index, especially by providing facilities for young people and families in the town centre. Provide access and links to a wide range of community groups and support networks
- Creates long term sustainability with increased capacity for Helston's over-subscribed Youth Café with a larger, better serviced space co-located with Cornwall youth support team. Supports young people in the place they want to be with active pursuits they want to do
- Provides opportunities for young people to be entrepreneurial, managing their own community businesses and having input into the management of the whole building, making possible real-life education and training
- Creates increased footfall in the town centre, not just from residents but also the wider rural area as well as visitors to Cornwall. The project will provide a reason for the community to use its town centre arresting economic decline
- Addresses a derelict asset which has been a blight on the town centre of Helston, refurbishing and re-using it for the community
- Provides a minimum of 17 new jobs, 3 new enterprises, increased clinical and well-being intervention and 3,500 p.a. additional youth interventions
- Creates a facility which will help to reduce the isolation of armed forces children and families who are often temporary residents in the area
- Creates a facility in the centre of our community that encourages inter-generational activities such as bouldering, and promotes fitness and well-being through a range of physical activities that have the ability to engage all age groups in shared leisure pursuits

- Delivers against Cornwall’s and the NHS’s Net Zero Strategy by ensuring sustainability is at the project’s heart a Carbon Net Zero (EPC A+) building incorporating, for example, ground source heating, solar PV etc.)
- Demonstrates that a sustainable, community ownership model can deliver essential community services where public sector bodies have been unable to find a solution

The lower floor supports and builds upon the outcomes of the upper floor refurbishment. At its core is the provision of opportunities for young people but the impact of the project will spread across the whole community. The ability to create close linkages between the co-located services and the ability to cross refer people for support is a significant innovation for Cornwall and will provides an exemplar for future community strategies. The whole provides much more than the sum of the parts.

Key Dates

Project Start on site – 1st March 2024

Completion of Phase 1 - upper floor GP Surgery and community space – 1st April 2025

Completion of Phase 2 - lower floor activity, youth and families’ space – 1st October 2025

Completion of car park refurbishment – 1st September 2025

