



State-of-the-art equipment forms part of the redevelopment



A warm welcome at reception

# Take a look inside

Benenden Hospital, located in the beautiful Weald of Kent, has just undergone a £55 million redevelopment. So what's new? Eugene Costello went to find out

**D**riving to Benenden Hospital, you pass through quintessentially English countryside. Fields of arable land – this is the Garden of England, after all – give way to villages with greens, pubs and the odd oast house with its conical roof, characteristic of the county.

After passing along hedgerow-lined lanes with canopies of elms, you arrive at the hospital itself. Double-height floor-to-ceiling windows reach the apex of the enormous pitched roof – this doesn't look like your average hospital.

Step through the doors and the entrance atrium is vast and airy. There are numerous

pods of seating for patients and guests, and to one side is a large restaurant.

On the walls of the atrium are large flat screens with changing displays. Lavish shots of landscapes and fauna in the area give way to historical medical and surgical equipment used throughout the history of Benenden Hospital. It's a rich heritage; the hospital was set up in 1907 as a sanatorium for postal workers suffering from tuberculosis. The ethos of being a membership-based

### The foundation stone

mutual with its roots in the cooperative and trades union movement is in the Society's DNA. The original foundation stone from when the hospital was opened by Queen Victoria's daughter, Princess Christian, has been re-laid outside the entrance to the restaurant.

### Preserving heritage

Benenden Hospital director of business development Denise Telford, who worked in nursing before moving across to business development, was instrumental in overseeing the reception area and atrium.



HUGH TURVEY



The main entrance features floor-to-ceiling windows, which reach the apex of the roof



Digitised shots of landscapes and fauna are on display in the atrium



Graham Goddard, project director



The new wards are light and spacious

Denise says: "I've worked at the hospital for 30 years. We had a museum; the curator, like me, was a nurse and was passionate about keeping our history alive. He won the Lord Plant Travelling Fellowship, open to employees, to do so, and learned how to curate and archive."

The museum he created was lovely, says Denise, but when it came to redevelopment, a more space-efficient and modern way of displaying the hospital's heritage was required. Denise contacted Hugh Turvey, resident artist at the Royal College of Radiographers, and they came up with the plan of documenting all the curios in the collection, painstakingly photographing them and digitising the results for display on the flat screens in the atrium.



**Modern design**  
Denise also consulted designer and architect Helen Whinray from the Design Buro to assimilate this aspect into the wider offering that Benenden wished to achieve with the atrium. This means that the digitised archive was subsumed skilfully into the overall feel of light enhanced with the use of glass and steel, and strong pastel colours.

Hugh also took panoramic landscapes of the rolling country around the hospital, as well as the flora and fauna such as orange lichen and field mushrooms. These shots of this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are displayed on the screens.

Says Denise: "We wanted a practical and peaceful space for patients that also delivered the wow factor. This is something they have achieved in spades."

### Benenden Hospital redevelopment highlights

**NEW FEATURES INCLUDE**

- A light and airy atrium complete with digital displays
- A patient and staff restaurant
- Patient car park
- A scanning and imaging suite (see page 28)
- A new outpatients department
- Dedicated eye unit
- Three large, state-of-the-art theatres that are digitally operated and, unusually, have windows installed
- An ambulatory care unit
- Bensan ward with many en-suite patient rooms

### Before and after

The hospital was originally a sanatorium for postal workers – this was the dining room at the time; and, right, today's modern version of the dining area



THEN



NOW

On a tour of the central block, east and west wings, including the new Bensan Ward, Benenden Hospital development project director Graham Goddard points out the achievements with evident pride. Aesthetics and patient comfort underpin the changes that have been made to the hospital. One small example can be seen in the attractive glass balustrades with steel handrails on show in the double-depth, mezzanine area of the atrium.

Graham explains: "We were advised that it would be cheaper to have fire-retardant glass extending to the ceiling but we felt that this would create too much of a goldfish-bowl, claustrophobic effect. The solution was to have this open system with balustrades and fire curtains that drop down to seal the space in the case of fire – we felt it was a price worth paying in terms of effect and patient ease."

Graham's background was in the NHS, and he had been project director on a major PFI initiative for the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust. He left in 2012 to take charge of the Benenden Hospital redevelopment; now aged 64, this is an impressive swansong to his career, though he plans to stay on part-time as a member of the hospital's executive.

### A therapeutic environment

As we walk around, Graham explains the thinking behind the build. "One of the challenges was working with the local authority, given the sensitive nature of the surrounding area, being an AONB. We made a commitment to landscaping and investment in mitigation to help ensure approval."

For a project director, Graham shows an understanding of what he calls "the patient journey", as well as a knowledge of an area of medical thought known as "the healing environment", an approach that has underpinned decisions behind the build.

### THE WORK IN NUMBERS

**556,048**

staff hours spent on the project\*

**33,000m<sup>3</sup>**

of soil excavated (the subsoil and topsoil have been stored and recycled within the scheme)

**84**

sub-contractors involved in the project

**498**

door sets have been installed (approximate)

**1.86**

miles of pipework have been plumbed in (approximate)

**247,000**

bricks have been used in the construction

**99.97%**

waste diverted from landfill



\*UP TO 31/7/2017 (FACTS AND FIGURES PROVIDED BY WILLMOTT DIXON)

"We want the patient journey to be as straightforward, logical and pleasant as possible, so that meant thinking about where to put departments and choosing sensible co-locations," he says.

"And best practice known as the healing environment meant that we wanted to give patients, and especially in-patients, a room of their own, a view to the outside, fresh air, their own bathroom and toilet, and control of their environment through air-conditioning and heating. Studies show that if you do that, patients recover more quickly post-operatively, and require less analgesic, so we made sure that was incorporated into the design. It meant additionally that we could take advantage of the magnificent surroundings."

### Individuals at the heart

What this means is that, working with subcontractors Willmott Dixon and the Design Buro, Benenden Hospital is now a first-class, modern hospital. Gone are the clusters of six-bed-bay wards; now patients are treated in 38 individual rooms, many with en-suite wet rooms.

Add to that an imaging suite (CT and MRI), an ophthalmic clinic, physiotherapy rooms and a gym, plus generous consulting rooms, and it is clear the hospital is, as Graham puts it, "future-proofed for at least the coming decade".

Graham is especially proud of the ceiling-mounted, ultra-clean air-curtains within two of the new theatres. Special skylights also let in daylight, which helps keep the environment natural for theatre teams who may be working long sessions during surgical procedures. "It's a clinical environment that is highly regarded by our clinicians," says Graham.

The project is a highlight of Graham's career, and means that Benenden Hospital is embracing its future while acknowledging its rich heritage.