The Natural Health Service
Greening project transforms Ayrshire hospitals into Natural Health Service

An innovative project of greenspace improvements to the grounds of two Ayrshire hospitals is boosting healthier lifestyles for patients, staff, visitors and the local community.

As part of the project, a new path network has been created which links up both University Hospital Ayr and Ailsa Hospital, providing attractive places for exercise, relaxation and recuperation.

Patients have said the paths offer a “peaceful and therapeutic” environment and clinical staff use the paths for “walk and talk” meetings. Staff also report that they are beginning to use the grounds for walking and relaxation and report mental health benefits from taking time away from busy wards to ‘de-stress and unwind’.

The local community regularly use the wooded grounds for walking and to view wildlife. Dr Martin Cheyne, Chairman of Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board, took a tour of the new walks on Monday 5 October, when he officially opened the new paths at a launch event.

Dr Cheyne said: “I am delighted to open these new paths for use by all our staff, patients and visitors. The scenery at University Hospital Ayr and Ailsa Hospital is simply stunning and I hope this new network of paths will encourage more people to fully explore our grounds and enjoy the outdoors.”

Forestry Commission Scotland, NHS Ayrshire & Arran and Scottish Natural Heritage have teamed up together to transform and revitalise the hospital grounds as part of a Scotland-wide project of Greening the NHS estate.
Kevin Lafferty, Forestry Commission Scotland’s health advisor added:

“By increasing connectivity between the hospital built and natural environment we are improving the whole area for people and wildlife.

“Simply having the choice to get out in the fresh air, be more active or take time to relax or convalesce can improve the quality of life for patients, staff and visitors.

“This project is a great example because the greenspace improvements have also helped the hospitals become more integrated with the local community – it’s a win win project.”

The project is very much in keeping with the Scottish Government’s vision for a “health promoting health service” with an increased emphasis on prevention rather than cure and could act as a catalyst for similar projects to be taken forward elsewhere.

Dr Carol Davidson, Director of Public Health said:  “When Ailsa Hospital opened in 1869, spending time in the outdoors and being in the fresh air were seen as central elements of recovery and care. However, the post war period saw a move away from nature as part of rehabilitation and recovery towards a greater reliance on technology and therefore buildings and indoor environments.

“Investing in NHS Greenspace is a cost effective way of increasing opportunities for therapeutic outdoor activities for patients, improving staff health, and strengthening the symbiotic relationship between health and the natural environment.”

Staff and patients will soon be able to leave the car behind and walk or cycle to the hospital from Maybole and Ayr for the first time.

Around 2,500 trees have been planted to green up the area further and numerous benches offer seating and rest areas with viewpoints along the paths. Interpretation panels outside and inside the hospitals encourage people to visit the outdoors and use the improved greenspace.
At the event, Dr Cheyne toured the attractive woodlands and greenspace at the campus and planted a Scots Pine in the woodland. He also met a local group of nursery children who were learning willow weaving and saw a Tai Chi demonstration and heard a storyteller giving tales about the hospitals.

Other hospitals that are involved in the Forestry Commission Scotland NHS Greening programme include Ninewells Hospital in Dundee, Forth Valley Royal Hospital in Larbert and Gartnavel Hospital in Glasgow.

Ends

Notes to news editors

1. Forestry Commission Scotland is the Scottish Government’s forestry advisor and regulator. [www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland).

2. Media enquiries: Forestry Commission Scotland: Steve Williams, 0300 067 6508, NHS Ayrshire & Arran, Luan Johnston 01563 826111

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Photograph:
October/woodland walks/

12: Dr Martin Cheyne cuts the ribbon at the entrance to the new paths at University Hospital Ayr
33: Dr Martin Cheyne plants a tree along the Woodland Walks with the help of some NHS Ayrshire & Arran estates staff
38: Youngsters from Busy Bees Nursery came along to celebrate the opening of the new paths
41: Dr Cheyne is joined by some young helpers in the newly created teaching circle.

For further media enquiries about this topic, please contact:

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