

# Healthy Buildings. Two phases of a live project.

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*Figure 1. Flex Wall (Designers: A Courts, O Bingham, N Coyle, H Crick, H Azhuril, A Nazri. Photographer: Ralph Saull)*

In 2016-17, year 1 undergraduate students at the Oxford Brookes School of Architecture collaborated with “The Hill” on a live project to test ideas via prototypes and initial designs for a Digital Wellbeing Hub. The Hill is a digital healthcare ideas lab based at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford and supported by Digital Health Oxford, Oxford University Hospitals and Oxford Academic Health Science Network. Their mission is to initiate delivery of sustainable healthcare with a focus on digital health. The Hub building will act as the focus point for their activities, creating an identity and base for the project.

The Hub caters for patients, carers, nurses, doctors, healthcare professionals, designers, developers, researchers, business leaders and investors. They provide a network and opportunities for dialogue via provision of mentors, business support and funding. The Hill also provides co-working space and hosts events. The Hub building will stimulate and enable members of the public to propose, develop and realise ideas to improve health and well-being that exploit digital technology. A flexible space of approximately 25m<sup>2</sup> is required that can welcome, promote, communicate and encourage engagement with The Hill’s many stakeholders.

The live project took place over the course of two connected projects on the theme of “Healthy Buildings”, exploring the potential of architecture to promote wellbeing. In the first four weeks, students worked in twenty-four groups of five. Each group designed and built a full scale prototype *Fragment* of the Hub. These included walls that flexed to become surfaces for sitting, meeting and display; a chandelier device that enabled user engagement to adjust shadow and pattern; and a room divider that allowed occupants to customise the privacy and light quality of their space via an expanding and contracting network of cubes. These were tested out during an interactive event in the atrium of Oxford Brookes School of Architecture. Our collaborators invited colleagues working in the field of Public Health to join them in testing out each proposal, discussing their pros and cons with students who gave a presentation of each project. The presentations were filmed to enable our collaborators to discuss the ideas to other colleagues elsewhere. The Fragments were then installed in a publically accessible

exhibition space on campus so that further feedback could be gathered from peers and visitors.



Figure 2. Healthy Buildings Event, Atrium of Oxford Brookes School of Architecture (Ruth Cuenca)

In the second, eight-week project, students worked individually to propose initial designs for the complete Hub building, using what had been learned from the prototype Fragments project. Students produced scaled models and drawings of design proposals. Proposals included space divisions inspired by the mutation of cells, a multi-level space that connected different departments of the hospital and an expanding space that also served as a set for the broadcast of TED Talks.

The work from these two projects was curated into an exhibition held for three months at the Churchill Hospital to stimulate wider public feedback. A book was created and given to our collaborators to summarise the findings and feedback from the two projects. This was disseminated among their organisation and used to inform potential funders and supporters. The project to undertake detailed design and construction is being undertaken over the course of the 2017-18 academic year by a group of 25 undergraduate students in Years 2 and 3. The Year 2 students

participated in the first two phases of the project while they were in Year 1.

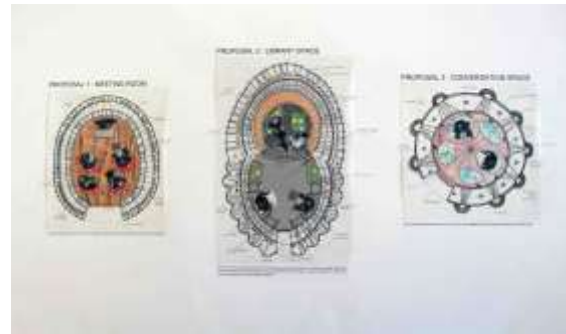


Figure 3. Pod Carnival (Shannon Leigh Donohue)

Following an analysis of the whole cohort of students' proposals, it was found that there were recognisable patterns in the strategies that students employed in their designs in order to promote wellbeing. Below is a synthesis of the design for wellbeing strategies that were found. The Manifesto for Healthy Buildings summarises the ways that architecture, architectural design and architects can promote wellbeing.

### A Manifesto for Healthy Buildings.

1. Architectural objects can.....create wellbeing:

- Architecture is a physical filter for light, air, sound, smell, temperature and water.
- Buildings bring us into direct contact with endless choices of materials and textures.

2. Architectural design can.....create strategies for wellbeing:

- Strategic spatial and programmatic design decisions that promote physical and mental health and comfort include exercise, movement, rest, community, communication, inclusion, security, nutrition and hygiene.

3. Architects can.....be wellbeing champions:

- Architects can promote and sustain wellbeing through their actions via participation, aesthetics, quality, site / place, accessibility, sustainability,

Architecture Connects, aae 2017 conference

**CASE STUDY**

programme, spatial configuration,  
concept, material selection and

environmental design.

