

Maggie's Architecture and Landscape Brief



MAGGIE'S

Everyone's home of cancer care



Maggie's Oldham
Architect: Alex de Rijke
Opened in 2017

About Maggie's

In 1995, our founder, Maggie Keswick Jencks, wrote this about her experience of cancer:

"A diagnosis of cancer hits you like a punch in the stomach...No road. No compass. No map. No training...At one time, I could not sit, or lie, or stand, listen or speak coherently because my shattered mind vibrated so violently through my body I felt I might disintegrate."

Over the course of seven years, Maggie went through a cancer diagnosis, treatment, remission and recurrence. During that time, she took the insight and experience she had gained and transformed it into a pioneering approach to cancer care.

Among Maggie's beliefs about cancer treatment was the importance of environment to a person dealing with cancer. She talked about the need for "thoughtful lighting, a view out to trees, birds and sky," and the opportunity "to relax and talk away from home cares". She talked about the need for a welcoming, reassuring space, as well as a place for privacy, where someone can take in information at their own pace.

We've taken Maggie's blueprint for a model of cancer care and grown it into a network of centres across the UK, supporting and empowering hundreds of thousands of people with cancer, as well as their families and friends.

Maggie's gives people with cancer, and all the people who love them, somewhere to turn to at an extremely difficult moment in their lives. Always close to a major cancer hospital, they are informal "domestic" buildings where people can draw on practical, emotional and social support, without the need for a referral or an appointment.

They are calm, friendly places designed to help ordinary people who have cancer find the hope, determination and resources they need to cope with one of the toughest challenges any of us are likely to face.

Maggie's asks a lot of its buildings and their landscapes, and hence a lot from its architects and garden designers. Our buildings are special, not for some luxury add-on value, but because we need them to do so much for us. They set the scene and the tone for everything that happens at Maggie's.

The job of those who work at Maggie's, is to support people living with cancer. Each person needs to find the way that is right for him or herself, but most people will need some help, at some stage, in finding out what their own way is. Maggie's has a carefully worked out series of options, a "set of tools" to choose from...from individual to group support, workshops on different aspects of living with cancer, relaxation strategies and help with information.

Architectural Brief

The work of the building, the landscape and the environment

More than anything else this brief is about the feelings we need the design of these places to convey to the people who will be visiting them.

The building, landscape, interior design and artwork each add a different dimension and depth to the support people get from Maggie's. They have a significant emotional impact on those who come in. If they raise someone's spirits even for a moment, they will have done a good job. To do this, our buildings must look friendly, they must have clarity.

All too often the first time someone comes to Maggie's, that person is feeling both frightened and vulnerable. We know that it often takes three or four attempts before someone makes it through the door. It takes courage to come in. Coming in means accepting that you have cancer or that someone you love has cancer. People won't come in if they feel intimidated. We have to make it as easy as possible.

The centre footprint will be minute in relation to the hospital and Maggie's must shine out like a beacon of hope. We want people who see it to say to themselves "That must be the Maggie's centre they were talking about, that bright red building" or "By the giant Wellingtonia, it looks great, I'll go over and have a look."

Our buildings and garden landscapes have to invite you in. The path to the centre must beckon and guide you to what is clearly the front door. The way the path is planted can help you shed some of the stress of the hospital atmosphere before you even reach the front door. The landscape gives a bit of breathing space between the two worlds of hospital and normal life (which isn't quite so normal anymore).

Whilst our buildings should look friendly and welcoming, they should not belittle what people are going through by being too 'cosy'. Having cancer is not all right...facing the brutal possibility that you could die and what that means for you and your family is not something you can fix with some comfy armchairs and cheerful paint on the walls. These places should look as if they are acknowledging what people are going through, saluting the magnitude of the challenge they are facing and themselves rising to the challenge of trying to help. They should be beautiful.

Maggie's Royal Free
Architect: Daniel Libeskind
Opened in 2024





Maggie's Dundee
Landscape design: Arabella Lenox-Boyd
Opened in 2003

All too often the person who turns to Maggie's does so because cancer has turned their world upside down. Even if the first time they venture in they only want a small thing, maybe just a cup of tea and a chance to catch their breath, they are hoping for more.

Our buildings and their landscapes offer them that possibility.

Maggie's centres can, and should, look (and feel) bold and self-confident, inviting and safe. They must look and feel joyous, they must have both zest and calm. The impression they must give is "I can imagine feeling different here."

People who are living with cancer need courage, self-confidence and resourcefulness to get on with their lives...and yet courage and resourcefulness crumble under the all too common attacks of fear, helplessness and intense loneliness that often come with a cancer diagnosis. How do you re-gain your confidence, in circumstances so withering to your capacity to hope?

These buildings and gardens, the way they are furnished, the art on the walls or in the garden, are designed to help people draw on strengths they may think they no longer have. We want Maggie's to kindle people's curiosity and imagination, to nudge them towards possibilities beyond being "just another cancer patient."

If people are going to live, they need to feel as if they, not cancer, are in charge of their lives.

We ask the spaces in our buildings and landscapes to allow the people who use them to take charge of how they want to use them. We want to encourage them to make choices.

Even something quite small, like choosing where they want to make themselves comfortable, is important. Knowing that it is fine to pick up a chair and move it where they want, outside maybe, if it's warm enough; to choose the cushion that makes the chair just the right height for them, or to be able to make their own cup of tea, breaks the rigidity of "I have no choice, I've got cancer."

Distress paralyses you, locks you in. The temptation, when things are tough, is to curl up, to withdraw...We don't want our centres to be citadels with the drawbridge drawn up. That is much too close to the frame of mind that cancer throws you into. We want Maggie's to shelter people who need us but to be open to the outside world, to encourage them to look out.

We ask our landscape designers and architects to work closely together from the beginning of a project. It would be wonderful if we could work with a particular artist from the very beginning of the project too. The interplay between outside and inside space, the built and the “natural” environment is an important one. Sheltered inside, it helps to be reminded by a seasonal and changing scene outside, that you are still part of a living world.

We hope that our landscape gardeners will use their planting plans to incorporate scent as well as sight, to think about how their planting will behave in the rain as well as in the sun, to create areas which will have filtered privacy, to plant bulbs which will come up each year, trees and shrubs that bud blossom and berry, and plants that “die well” before returning next year.

Sometimes, all that a person can bear, if they are in acute distress, is to look out of the window from a sheltered place, at the branch of a tree moving in the wind. We would like there to be as many opportunities as possible to look out from wherever you are in the building, even if it is to an internal planted courtyard.

We want our buildings to coax people out of their feeling of isolation and to help them feel less locked in. We need spaces that make it easy for people to talk to each other and feel less alone. We need to think about the degrees in which people want privacy, to offer them corners to tuck up in with a book, but also places where they can sit and watch, but not necessarily join in. We need to think about how our rooms are going to work, and how they are going to be furnished. If they are sitting rooms, the shape needs to take into consideration sofas, chairs and how they will group together, including the incline of the walls allowing for that.

What we are looking for in our architects and our designers is an imagination and thoughtfulness which looks beyond the normal boundaries of function. We want you to show us how a building and a landscape can do the things we are asking of it (and more) without us having pre-conceived ideas about how you are going to do it.



Maggie's Glasgow
Architect: Rem Koolhaas
Opened in 2011



Maggie's Cardiff
Architects: Biba Dow and Alun Jones
Opened in 2019

Relationship between Maggie's and the hospital it is supporting

Maggie's centres are built within the grounds of cancer hospitals and treatment centres. In almost every case the leadership team which runs the hospital has asked us to build them a Maggie's.

The hospital's job is to diagnose and treat cancer. The job of Maggie's is to help the person who is being treated for cancer (or has had treatment for cancer) and their family and friends with the major upheaval it brings to their lives. The hospital and centre play different but complementary roles: each recognises that in order to recover from cancer you need both kinds of help.

Hospitals are geared to the delivery of their medical services, and their effectiveness depends on processing the needs of the thousands of people who pass through as efficiently as possible. Hospital sites are enormous. Mostly they grow incrementally as more and more treatments and equipment become available. They seem hopelessly confusing to the uninitiated, a confusion compounded rather than simplified by the proliferation of sign-posting, endless corridors and long treks between departments. The patients who have to negotiate them are likely to feel like very small cogs in a very large machine. It isn't a good feeling.

Maggie's scale is deliberately a domestic one, the antithesis of the hospital's. The concern is for you as a person; the focus is on you, not your diagnosis.

We need to think of all the aspects about a hospital layout which are demoralising: the closed doors implying secrets withheld, the endless corridors, the signposting, the artificial light, and then unpick and unravel these.

At Maggie's we don't have signs, even on the toilets...you wouldn't in your own home, would you?

Maggie's and its local community

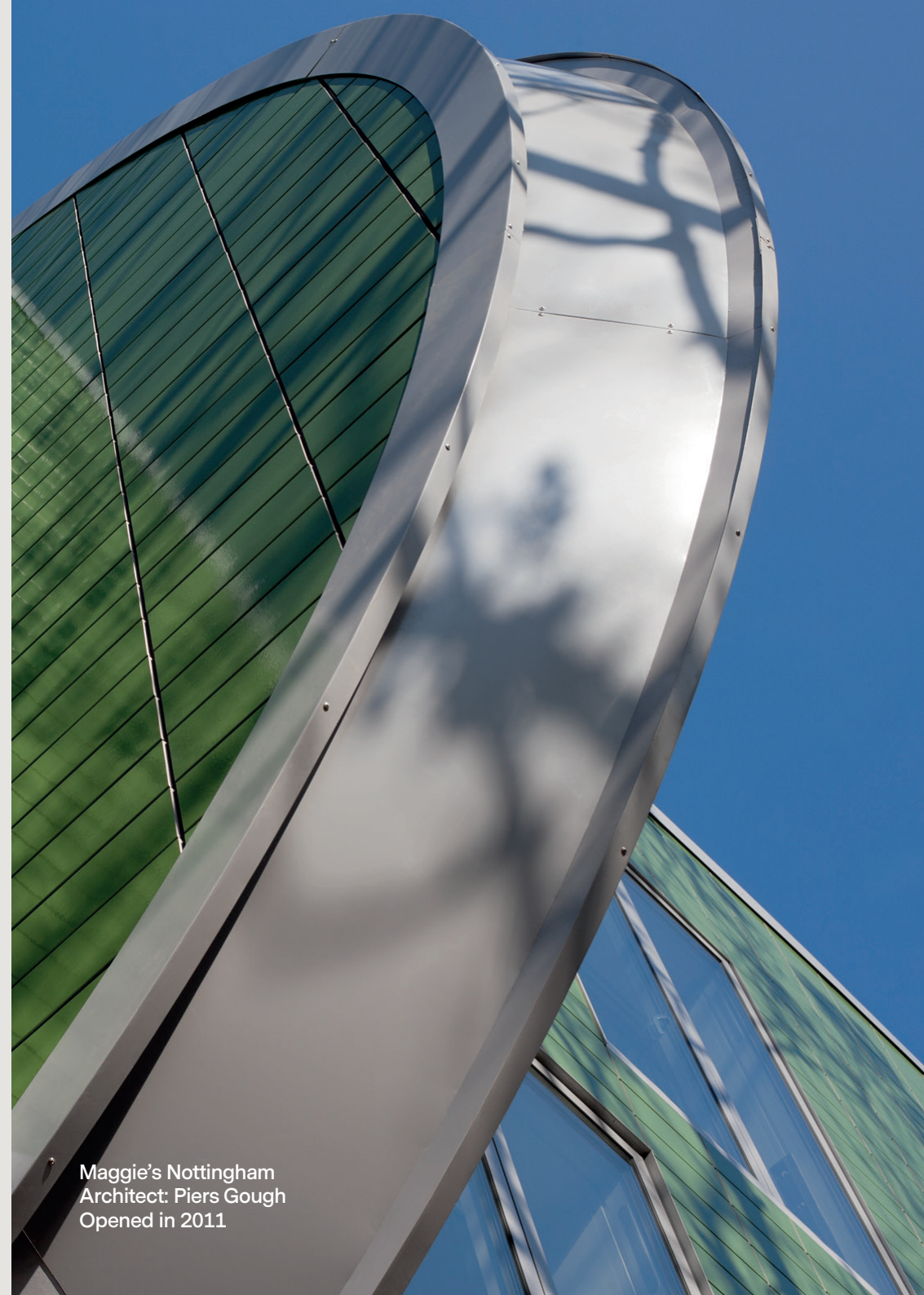
Each Maggie's centre is unique. We need the local community to be proud of their Maggie's...we want local people to know they have a welcoming place to turn to, should they ever need it. It is "their" Maggie's, it belongs to them and they are proud of it.

We hadn't realised, until it happened, how important this element was for the fundraising that is needed for each Maggie's, as each centre is self-funded. Both the capital costs of the building in the first-place and then the annual running costs thereafter have to be raised. The building and landscape need to be their own ambassador in their local community. We rely on people knowing and talking about "their" Maggie's.

How the building and garden will be used

Some will visit Maggie's for the first time when they get diagnosed. Others will not be ready to address the emotional fallout of having cancer, sometimes until long after their treatment. If you have or have had cancer, everything is not necessarily done and dusted by medical treatment.

Families and friends might visit during or after the treatment of someone they love, including after someone they love has passed away. People are very likely to come in for one reason, for example benefits advice or because they are brought in by a friend, and end up using the centre in a different way to the one they had originally envisaged. With guidance from one of the professional staff who works there, they may then make use of some other part of the carefully tailored programme of support Maggie's offers.



Maggie's Nottingham
Architect: Piers Gough
Opened in 2011

Maggie's Aberdeen
Architect: Snøhetta
Opened in 2013

Spatial Requirements

We want the ethos to be domestic. There should be as much natural light as possible.

Entrance: The entrance should be obvious, welcoming, and not intimidating, with a place to hang your coat and leave your brolly. To avoid draughts, a small entrance lobby may be appropriate.

Entrance/welcome area: We think of this as a “pause” space, in which a newcomer can see and assess what’s going on without feeling they have to jump right in. The first impression must be encouraging. There should be somewhere for you and a friend or relative to sit, a shelf with some books and an ability to assess, more or less, the layout of the rest of the building.

Office: The office space should be discreet but positioned so that a member of staff working at their desk can spot somebody new coming in to the centre, (there will be no reception desk). There should be generous storage room for stationery and leaflets. Space will be needed for a photocopier, printer, server etc. Each of the three main workstations needs a telephone, computer point and light, shelf and drawer space. As well as the main ones there should be six smaller workstations.

Kitchen: The kitchen area should have room for a large table to seat 12 and is usually the main hub of the building. A fairly large “island” with additional seating for two or three people is essential for nutrition workshops, and extra space for setting up food or drinks. You need to be able to move around the table, and between it and the island. The layout of the kitchen should encourage people to help themselves to tea and coffee. We need ideally two dishwashers (or one large and one small), a large fridge or two smaller ones, one and a half sinks, an oven and a hob.

Computer desk: We need two computer areas for people visiting the centre who want to access information online, and these need to be within shouting distance of the office area for help if needed...the two areas don’t have to be side by side.

Notice board: There should be space for a notice board to include fundraising and programme messaging – somewhere subtle, not too “in your face” but visible.

Library: A place to find books and information and be able to sit and look at them comfortably. Some part of the library needs to have shelving for leaflets and booklets. This space could well be integrated with the “pause space” or an extension of it.



Sitting rooms: We need three “sitting rooms” which can be shut off from each other or opened up depending on how they are to be used:

1. The first large room will be used for relaxation groups, t'ai chi, yoga, lectures or meetings and should provide sufficient space to accommodate 12 people lying down and storage room for folding chairs and yoga mats. It also needs to be able to store table(s) for up to 10 people. A flexible space with options to provide more or less privacy would be helpful. The noise from the main hub area of the building needs to be buffered...it doesn't have to be completely sound-proof. It helps if this room is contiguous to the kitchen area, so that it is also possible to have fundraising events there.
2. The second medium-to-large sized room will be used for workshops and sessions, and needs a table able to seat 12 people, which could be permanent or easy to assemble and store. This room doesn't have to be completely sound-proof either, but should be able to be private and not to be looked in on.
3. A third smaller sitting/counselling room for up to 12 people with a fireplace or stove which doesn't have to be very big - it makes for a friendlier atmosphere if people have to budge up a bit.

Consultation rooms: Two small rooms used for counselling or therapy, these need windows looking out to grass/trees, or at least a bit of sky. One of the rooms should be able to take a treatment bed. Both should be sound-proof and private when in use, but could be open when not in use.

Toilets: Two toilets with washbasins and mirrors, which should be big enough to take a chair and a bookshelf and one of them must have disabled access. They must be private enough to cry, they should never have gaps beneath the doors.

Retreat: A very small quiet space to have a rest or a lie down would be good.

Views out: It is important to be able to look out and even step out from as many of the internal spaces as possible even if it is only into a planted courtyard. Planting works well here too. It not only gives a focus to look out at, it can filter privacy in a room with glass doors or windows to the outside. We want the garden, like the kitchen, to be a space for people to share and feel refreshed by.

Views in: The interior shouldn't be so open that people feel watched or unprotected.

Parking: Most projects require some parking spaces.



Maggie's Oxford
Architect: Wilkinson Eyre
Opened in 2014



Maggie's Newcastle
Architect: Ted Cullinan
Opened in 2013

Budget

Our buildings need to be built as economically as possible, without compromising what we are trying to achieve. We know that any kind of “complex” building costs more to build, but it will have to be borne in mind, at design level, that we have a finite building budget and that subsequent building maintenance and cleaning should be as economical as possible. We don't want to have to assemble scaffolding to change a light bulb, for instance. We won't be employing full time gardeners.

This brief is a generic one. Each new centre will vary in size in proportion to the local cancer population, and there will be site specific variations.

What will not vary is the requirement to build a beautiful, small and humane building, which raises your spirits when you walk into it.

Client Team

Maggie's has a small client team and we like to be involved at every stage of the design from the commissioning of the building right through to the opening and beyond. This is a personal, not a “committee” project.

As clients, we see our job as trying to imagine, at every level, how these buildings will work for the people who will be using them. We want to enjoy ourselves, and for you to do so too. We think we will get a better result if we do. We want to be surprised and delighted. If we are, our centre visitors will be too.



maggies.org

Maggie's Keswick Jencks Cancer Caring Trust (Maggie's)
is a registered charity, no. SC024414

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