

CAGNI WILLIAMS

Dear Haithar,

This edition is particularly close to my heart, as it focuses on the **Midland Metropolitan University Hospital (MMUH)**—a project we began a decade ago and have been dedicated to ever since. Walking onto the site in 2014, I stood in a forgotten landscape: a closed Unipart warehouse on grounds that once housed one of the early GKN factories. The surrounding area was marked by disrepair and deprivation—a stark contrast to its proximity to the center of Birmingham, Britain's second-largest city. Business activity, urban quality, household income, and health outcomes all painted a challenging picture.

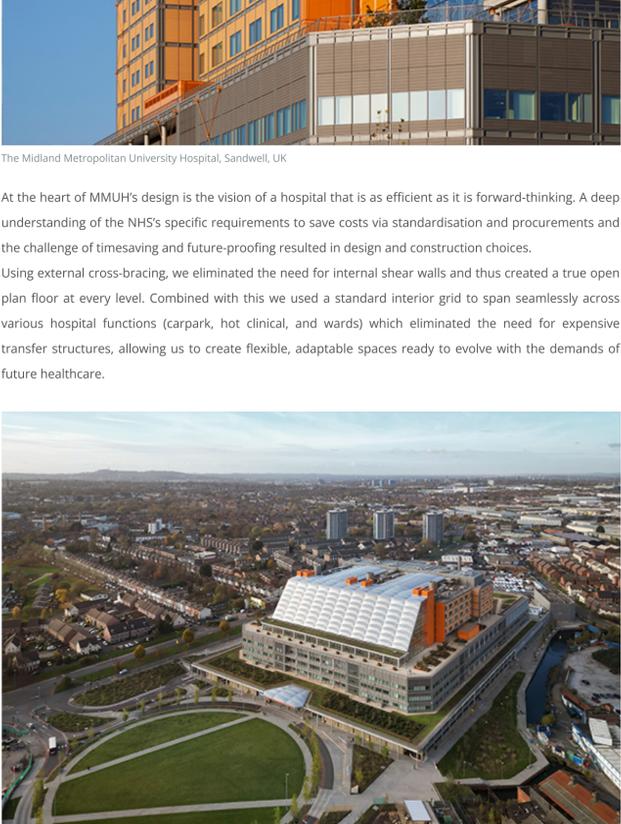
This was a sobering reminder of the weight and urgency of our work. Yet, it also underscored the transformative potential of architecture. I thought about how thoughtfully designed buildings and urban spaces could breathe new life into this part of the Midlands—a vision that has always driven my passion for architecture: to design a better world.

– Edward Williams

In the latest edition of RIBA Journal, Chris Foges posed a critical question to Dr. Sarb Clare, Deputy Chief Medical Officer: "So, will the design of this hospital produce real clinical benefits?" Dr. Clare's response was unequivocal: "Absolutely. The things that are fundamentally important to patients—light, comfort, colour—have really come through, and I would expect most of our key performance indicators to improve, from reduced length of stay to lower mortality rates."

Chris Foges aptly concludes, "If the delivery of MMUH confirms that designing large hospitals is uniquely challenging, it also proves that the rewards can be extraordinary." And indeed, this is the ultimate measure of success.

A flexible hospital for the future: standard grid and open floor plans



The Midland Metropolitan University Hospital, Sandwell, UK

At the heart of MMUH's design is the vision of a hospital that is as efficient as it is forward-thinking. A deep understanding of the NHS's specific requirements to save costs via standardisation and procurements and the challenge of timesaving and future-proofing resulted in design and construction choices.

Using external cross-bracing, we eliminated the need for internal shear walls and thus created a true open plan floor at every level. Combined with this we used a standard interior grid to span seamlessly across various hospital functions (carpark, hot clinical, and wards) which eliminated the need for expensive transfer structures, allowing us to create flexible, adaptable spaces ready to evolve with the demands of future healthcare.



Aerial view

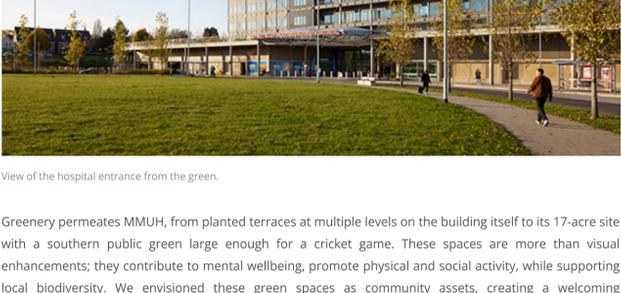
Building quality and flexibility through prefabrication



View of the canal side of the hospital.

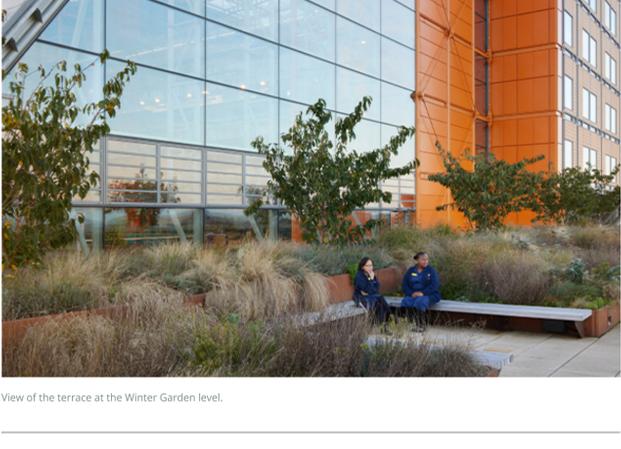
The prefabricated façade of MMUH, including the ETFE-inflated pillow roof over the Winter Garden, was integral to our approach. The modular and sub-modular assembly allowed for innovative adaptability—most notably when we had to replace timber on the ward façades due to new fire standards post-Grenfell without having to dismantle the existing structure. This adaptability enhances MMUH's resilience and underscores our commitment to both safety and quality.

Prefabrication ensured a higher-quality finish, reduced on-site time, and future-proofs the building's envelope allowing for easier maintenance, modification, and replacement. Without these modern methods of construction (MMC) and the standardised grid producing great savings the soaring indoor 4,000sqm Winter Garden would not have been possible.



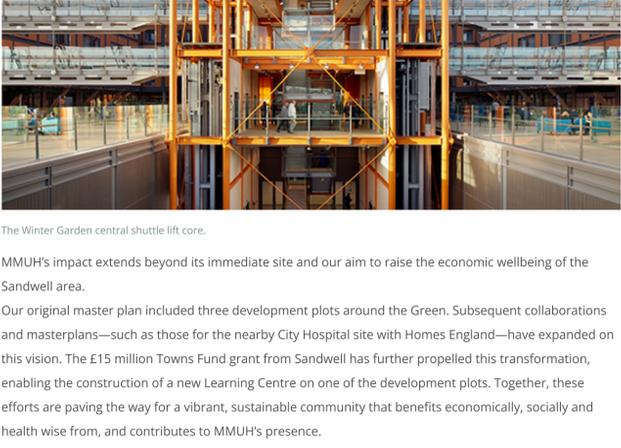
Main entrance leading to the shuttle lifts

Enhancing the urban landscape



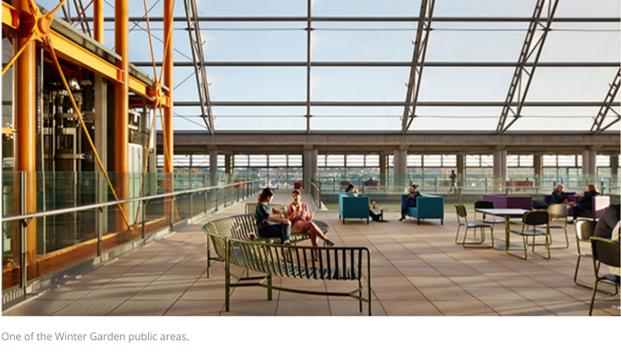
View of the hospital entrance from the green.

Greenery permeates MMUH, from planted terraces at multiple levels on the building itself to its 17-acre site with a southern public green large enough for a cricket game. These spaces are more than visual enhancements; they contribute to mental wellbeing, promote physical and social activity, while supporting local biodiversity. We envisioned these green spaces as community assets, creating a welcoming environment that reflects MMUH's role not only as a hospital for patients and staff, but as a vibrant hub for the surrounding community.



View of the terrace at the Winter Garden level.

Catalyst for local regeneration and wellbeing



The Winter Garden central shuttle lift core.

MMUH's impact extends beyond its immediate site and our aim to raise the economic wellbeing of the Sandwell area.

Our original master plan included three development plots around the Green. Subsequent collaborations and masterplans—such as those for the nearby City Hospital site with Homes England—have expanded on this vision. The £15 million Towns Fund grant from Sandwell has further propelled this transformation, enabling the construction of a new Learning Centre on one of the development plots. Together, these efforts are paving the way for a vibrant, sustainable community that benefits economically, socially and health wise from, and contributes to MMUH's presence.



One of the Winter Garden public areas.

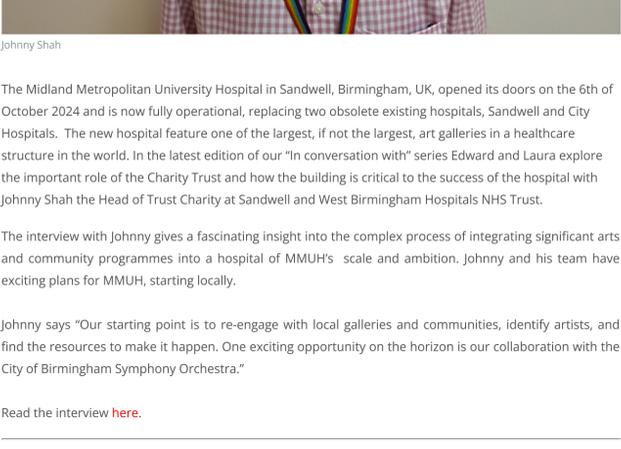
Midland's massive new hospital stacks up to deliver an uplifting experience for patients



Facade detail

The project was designed around the concept of a new approach to healthcare through wellbeing for both patients and the staff. The numbers of people using both the winter garden and the outside space is a fantastic testament that our vision has not only been understood but is also much appreciated. We had confirmation of how crucial it is to develop and communicate a strong, clear vision to all stakeholders and to maintain this throughout the construction. Several meetings, in-depth reviews, and small focus groups have been critical to inform and engage both the NHS and external stakeholders, building trust and support.

In conclusion we believe that MMUH solidifies our expertise and experience in designing and delivering large-scale hospital projects—and we loved every moment of it! A heartfelt thank you to our friends at the Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Hospital Trust, our architectural collaborators at HKS who expertly led the project team, Sonnemann Toon for their invaluable clinical insights, Balfour Beatty, and all the consultants involved. Together, we turned this vision into reality.

See more photos [here](#).

View of the hospital from the Gurdwara roof in Handsworth

In Conversation with Johnny Shah

Head of Trust Charity at Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust



Johnny Shah

The Midland Metropolitan University Hospital in Sandwell, Birmingham, UK, opened its doors on the 6th of October 2024 and is now fully operational, replacing two obsolete existing hospitals, Sandwell and City Hospitals. The new hospital feature one of the largest, if not the largest, art galleries in a healthcare structure in the world. In the latest edition of our "In conversation with" series Edward and Laura explore the important role of the Charity Trust and how the building is critical to the success of the hospital with Johnny Shah the Head of Trust Charity at Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust.

The interview with Johnny gives a fascinating insight into the complex process of integrating significant arts and community programmes into a hospital of MMUH's scale and ambition. Johnny and his team have exciting plans for MMUH, starting locally.

Johnny says "Our starting point is to re-engage with local galleries and communities, identify artists, and find the resources to make it happen. One exciting opportunity on the horizon is our collaboration with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra."

Read the interview [here](#).

The Midland Met in the news

Riba J, HDM, IHEEM, AJ, Architecture Magazine, BD Online, etc

November 2024 Ribaj and HDM magazine covers

As it opened its doors the new hospital attracted a significant press interest. It featured recently on the covers of the *Riba Journal* and the *Healthcare design & management magazine* (see above).

Other articles appeared in the *IHEEM Health Estate Journal*, *Architect's Journal*, *Architecture Magazine*, *Architecture Today*, *BD Online*, *Archello*, *Building* and the Spanish *Metalocus*. See also our interview published in the September 2024 edition of the *Healthcare design & management* magazine.

Click on the magazine titles to read the articles.

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