



The Helston Gateway Project

Maximising the potential of the Shared Prosperity Fund

Key Deliverables:

- Using empty retail premises to bring healthcare and wellbeing to the heart of the town. Medical, social prescribing, mental and physical health support, youth services and community meeting space in a single, purpose-designed building refurbishment. An exemplar for integrating health services into local high streets and combining this provision with wider facilities for the community.
- A community-led project created through local Place Shaping, managed as a not-for-profit community asset by local people, delivering precisely to community need. Unlocked by Cornwall Council support through Shared Prosperity and Town Centre Revitalisation funding.
- Innovative GP Surgery design supports the needs of an expanding local population, is equipped for healthcare staff training and includes a capability for outpatient treatment relieving pressure on Cornwall's only major hospital.
- The lease income from the GP Surgery is applied to sustain the co-located community and youth services ensuring that NHS rental payments are recycled to provide broader wellbeing benefit. The arrangement gives the ability to cross-refer between health, wellbeing and community services all operating from the same building.
- Innovative design re-purposes a derelict 1980's supermarket into a carbon 'net zero' building, creating an exemplar for sustainable construction. The project has been delivered by local people for local people, with the capital spend supporting the area's tradespeople, and procured through management contracting at 60% of the benchmark capital cost.
- Repurposing a substantial, derelict town centre retail building to provide health and wellbeing facilities to support a growing population; breathing new life into a declining rural market town by giving residents a reason to use their town centre, reversing footfall decline.



Project Summary



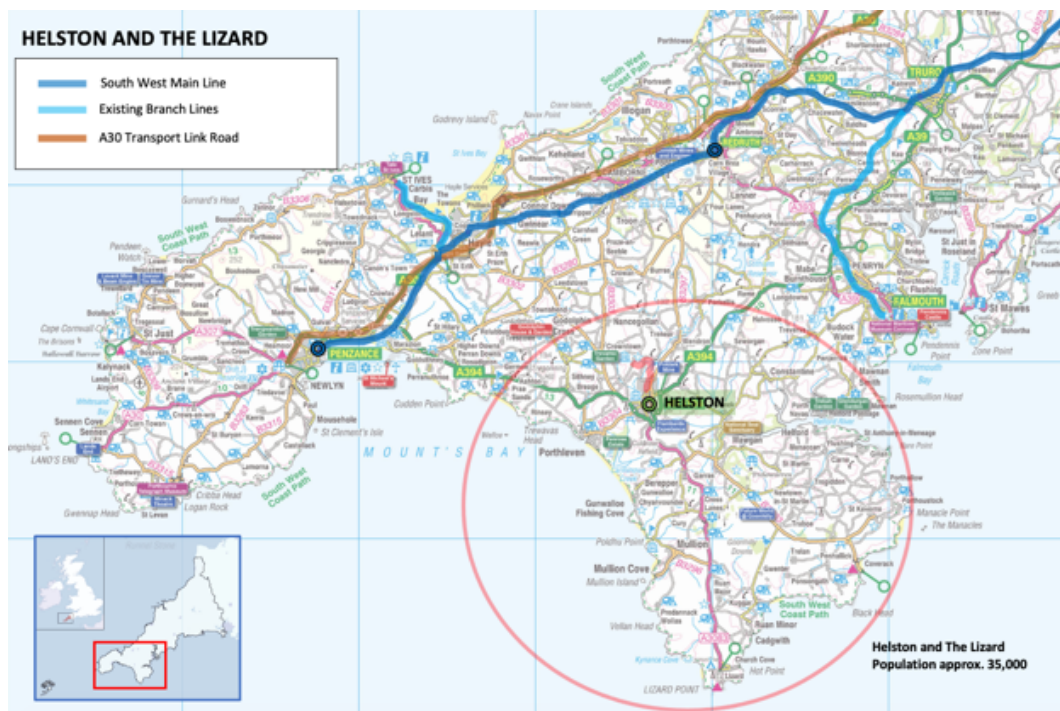
1.1. Overview

The Helston Gateway project is a community-led project to acquire and refurbish a large, derelict, town centre supermarket building to create much-needed facilities for a struggling rural market town. Unoccupied for over 7 years, the building's state of disrepair was a source of tremendous anger for residents. It created a sense of dereliction and despair in the heart of our community, engendering a lack of pride and dissuading visitors from the town centre.

Supported by Cornwall Council and with UK Shared Prosperity Funding, local community group South Kerrier Alliance CIC has been able to acquire the derelict building and commence refurbishment of the upper ground floor to create a large, new GP surgery alongside community space. The GP surgery is the anchor tenant with this rental income supporting broader community facilities in the lower ground floor and ensuring the project's sustainability.

The lower ground floor community facilities are designed for families and young people, centred around the need to provide expansion space for the town's youth café, allied with physical activity space: café, indoor and outdoor activities including climbing and bouldering, skating, skateboarding, parkour, events space for music and band practice and a music studio. Partner, community led youth support organisations are co-located, enabling them to work with families and young people in a place where they want to congregate.

Helston and the Lizard



In the times of Poldark, Helston was a thriving market town. A centre for tin coinage on the main route west and the trading centre of the Lizard peninsula. Once granite-lined pavements and impressive architecture attested to this status. Sadly, with spinal routes now along Cornwall's north coast, those days are gone.

England's most southerly town's rich heritage is now obscured by decline which besets many ex-market town centres. Poorly connected, car dependent, under-used, under-invested. An isolated, inland town by-passed on the way to the coast.

Helston provides few opportunities for people, young and old, to dwell and enjoy cultural and communal activities. It has become a 'pop-in-pop-out' place dominated by motor vehicles, characterised by poorly maintained public realm and vacant or low-quality commercial premises. The food offer is limited and dominated by out-of-town supermarkets, as is the night-time economy. Local people often drive elsewhere.

Yet intrinsically Helston is a beautiful place, with stunning views and the most listed structures in Cornwall. It is the rightful heart of the Lizard Peninsula and a place where more locals and visitors should spend time. Helston does not reach its economic potential, make the best of a glorious townscape, or serve its residents, whatever their economic status.

The Helston Gateway project will not only provide much needed community facilities, it will give the wider community of Helston and The Lizard a reason to use and appreciate their local town centre. The project is a key component of the Helston Place Shaping Plan and will have wide ranging impact upon the overall prosperity and vitality of Helston.

Key Facts



Helston has the worst 'Community Needs Index' of any town in Cornwall – 71% worse than the England average and 51% lower than the Cornwall average based on latest OCSI analysis published December 2024.

The town also has the highest proportion of young people (age 0-15) of any town in Cornwall, 10.02% above national average and 25.35% above Cornwall's average. Helston currently serves its large population of young people particularly badly.

With a population of 34,070, of which 12,265 are residents of Helston town, this is a predominantly rural area, characterised by small hamlets and villages lacking connection to the rest of Cornwall, creating significant difficulties of isolation and poor economics.

Having achieved significant expansion through edge-of-town housing developments, facilities within Helston (doctors, dentists, community and youth services) have not kept pace with population expansion. It is easier for this peripheral population to drive to out-of-town facilities rather than use their town centre, leading to traffic dominance, footfall decline and rising numbers of vacant premises.

Helston's public sector funding per head of population (2015 to 2023) was £16.45 compared with the Cornwall average of £871.58 per head for the Duchy's 11 largest towns. Helston ranks the worst funded out of all of the major Cornish towns by a significant margin.

Across the area there has been a general depopulation in people who are of 'working age' and gains in those who are in their early 70s. People over the age of 65 have increased in number by over 20%, increasing pressure on health services, whilst Helston North saw a fall in 25 to 49-year-olds of almost 15%. Young adults are significant in depopulation with falls in the region of 12-13% estimated, moving elsewhere for education and employment.

Sources: Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI), Local Insights, Cornwall Council CAP Data & Freedom of Information Requests.

Project Details

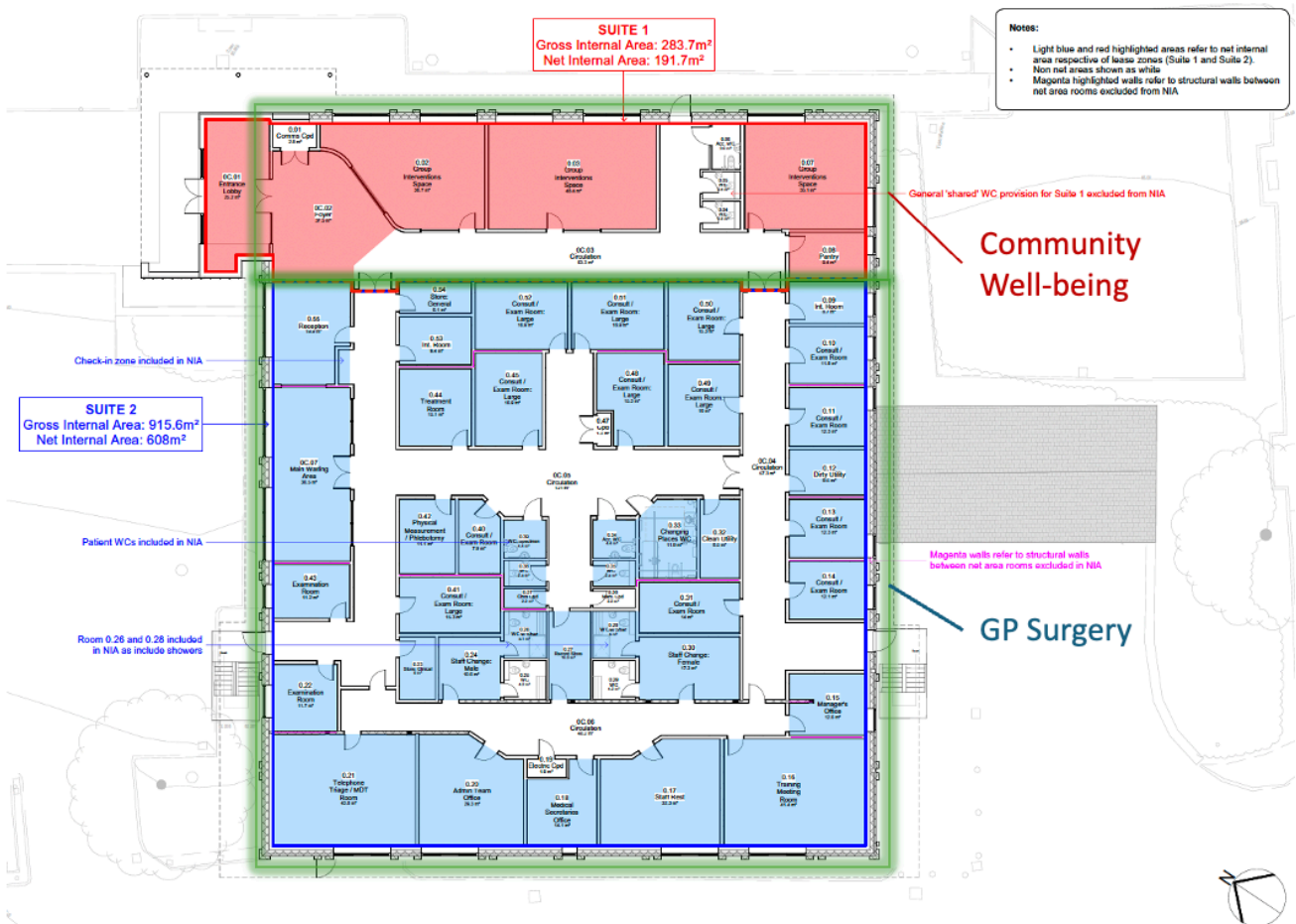
Through a consultative Place Shaping process, the community defined the need for services to be located in the centre of Helston. Feedback from consultations highlighted the need to address under-resourced healthcare capacity, to attract and retain young people and to provide community space, all key to arresting decline and dereliction in the town centre.

The Helston Gateway concept was developed to achieve multiple outcomes: utilise empty retail space to create a services centre, enhancing community access, fostering local business growth and creating inclusive spaces whilst delivering net-zero carbon performance.

Under community ownership, the building operates on a not-for-profit basis, with all income recycled into the sustainability of the community space.

Phase 1 - Upper Ground Floor

GP Surgery with adjacent community well-being space



Covering approximately three-quarters of the original supermarket retail floorspace, the building now provides a new, purpose-built GP Surgery incorporating 19 consulting and treatment rooms plus related ancillary support services. Designed to the latest health

practice and music studio. Co-location of partner youth support organisations enables them to work with families and young people in a place where they want to congregate.

Strong links between the GP Practice and Social Prescriber team on the upper floor enable referral to the youth support services within the activities space on the lower floor, creating an holistic well-being centre for an area of Cornwall which is so badly lacking in community services.

The project demonstrates that a sustainable, community ownership model can deliver essential community services and revitalise a neglected rural area.



Impact

Adjacent to a main town centre car park, which is the prime access point used by residents and visitors to Helston town centre, the once run-down area gave an extremely disappointing and negative impression of the town and was increasingly the centre of anti-social behaviour. Its state of dereliction in such a prominent location made it of huge importance to the community.

The impact of regenerating this area is significant. Not only does it address Helston and The Lizard's dire lack of community infrastructure, it also creates a Gateway to the town. Adjacent to the town's main shopping street the Helston Gateway project improves this downtrodden area and encourages more of the local and rural population to visit – a strong reason for residents and visitors to come to Helston town centre. 'Why would you come to Helston – there's nothing to do' was the most common response in resident surveys, especially from families and young people.

Importantly, the lower ground floor provides employment for members of the younger community, with 10 new jobs and 3 new 'start up' community businesses managing aspects of the activity provision eg. climbing, skating and café micro-businesses all based in the building. The café provides youth training opportunities and there is working space for youth support staff.

The refurbished space also provides activity space for the area's Youth Café. The existing Youth Café is located on the first floor of a terraced building and can host 45 young people

per session. There are 5,758 children and young people (aged 0 to 15 years) in Helston and the Lizard Community Network Area. With the Youth Café oversubscribed, there is a clear need for expansion and huge demand for youth services.

Once established the project will attract an estimated 29,100 visits p.a. of which 16,878 will be young people.

Project Outcomes

Specific outcomes flow from each phase of the project. However, the benefits of each phase are enhanced by the integration of the two phases: the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

As such it is difficult to discretely list the outcomes of each phase of the project as many overlap and re-enforce each other, as identified below:-

- 65% increase in healthcare capacity to support the well-being of a growing, aging population as well as a general population increase in the area due to significant new housebuilding.
- Supports NHS strategy to shift Royal Cornwall Hospital based outpatient settings to a more community-centred approach, delivering services locally (*Phase 1*)
- Provides facilities to drive a shift in the narrative of healthcare to a more preventative, personalised and proactive agenda (*Phase 1 & Phase 2*)
- Purpose built and state of the art facilities promote the sustainability of the healthcare workforce - focusing on increased training and improved recruitment (*Phase 1*)
- Provides facilities for community-based well-being organisations to work alongside clinical, social and activity-based services with capacity to address increasing mental health needs, particularly amongst the young (*Phase 1 & Phase 2*)
- Addresses Helston's dire Community Needs Index, especially by providing facilities for young people and families in the town centre. Provide access and links to a wide range of community groups and support networks (*Phase 1 & Phase 2*)
- Creates long term sustainability with increased capacity for Helston's over-subscribed Youth Café with a larger, better serviced space co-located with Cornwall youth support team. Supports young people in the place they want to be with active pursuits they want to do (*Phase 2*)
- Provides opportunities for young people to be entrepreneurial, managing their own community businesses and having input into the management of the whole building, making possible real-life education and training (*Phase 2*)

- Creates increased footfall in the town centre, not just from residents but also the wider rural area as well as visitors to Cornwall. The project will provide a reason for the community to use its town centre arresting economic decline (*Phase 1 & Phase 2*)
- Addresses a derelict asset which has been a blight on the town centre of Helston, refurbishing and re-using it for the community (*Phase 1 & Phase 2*)
- Provides a minimum of 10 new jobs, 3 new enterprises, increased clinical and well-being intervention and 3,500 p.a. additional youth interventions (*Phase 1 & Phase 2*)
- Creates a facility which will help to reduce the isolation of armed forces children and families who are often temporary residents in the area (*Phase 1 & Phase 2*)
- Creates a facility in the centre of our community that encourages inter-generational activities such as bouldering, and promotes fitness and well-being through a range of physical activities that have the ability to engage all age groups in shared leisure pursuits (*Phase 2*)
- Delivers against Cornwall's and the NHS's Net Zero Strategy by ensuring sustainability is at the project's heart (an EPC A+ building incorporating, for example, ground source heating, solar PV etc.) (*Phase 1 & Phase 2*)
- Demonstrates that a sustainable, community ownership model can deliver essential community services where public sector bodies have been unable to find a solution (*Phase 1 & Phase 2*).

The lower floor supports and builds upon the outcomes of the upper floor refurbishment. At its core is the provision of opportunities for young people but the impact of the project will spread across the whole community. The ability to create close linkages between the co-located services and the ability to cross refer people for support is a significant innovation for Cornwall and will provides an exemplar for future community strategies. The whole provides so much more than the sum of the parts.

Key Dates

Project Start on site – 1st March 2024

Completion of Phase 1 - upper floor GP Surgery and community space – 31st March 2025

Completion of Phase 2 - lower floor activity, youth and families' space – 30th June 2025