

*maggie's*

# Maggie's West London

Charing Cross Hospital

## Design Guide:

an architectural walkthrough by  
Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners



**Rogers  
Stirk  
Harbour  
+ Partners**

**Maggie's Centres** provide practical, emotional and social support for people with cancer, and their family and friends, following the ideas about cancer care originally laid out by Maggie Keswick Jencks.

Maggie lived with terminal cancer for two years and, in the time leading up to her death in 1995, used her knowledge and experience to create a blueprint for a pioneering approach to cancer care. She was determined that people should not 'lose the joy of living in the fear of dying' and in order to live more positively with cancer believed people need information that will allow them to be an informed participant in their medical treatment, stress-reducing strategies, psychological support and the opportunity to meet other people in similar circumstances in a relaxed domestic atmosphere.

In November 1996, the first Maggie's Centre opened in Edinburgh and what Maggie had planned became real. Maggie's continues to grow and today provides an evidence-based programme of support from 18 Centres in the UK, online and abroad.

**Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners** (RSHP) is an international architectural practice based in London. Over three decades, RSHP has attracted critical acclaim and awards with built projects across Europe, North America, Australia and Asia.

The practice employs around 200 people, including 9 Partners, 10 Associate Partners and 56 Associates, in offices across the world – London, Shanghai and Sydney. A 'Think Tank' philosophy is employed at every level, to enable design and management leaders to collaborate and contribute their individual expertise. This 'collegiate' approach to the work of the practice is embodied in a constitution that consciously brings a moral dimension to its work and takes the form of, among other initiatives, a staff profit-sharing scheme and significant contributions to charity, with staff members nominating the charities of their choice.

Richard Rogers has been widely recognised for his contribution to architecture and urbanism. To reflect the growing importance of two of the younger Partners, Graham Stirk and Ivan Harbour, and their role alongside Richard Rogers in the practice's future, Richard Rogers Partnership became Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners in 2007. Together with other long-standing Partners, Stirk and Harbour represent the inherent continuity and consistency of the philosophy which the practice applies to all its work.

**Ivan Harbour**, design lead on the Maggie's Centre, joined the practice in 1985, and has been key in developing its design language for over 25 years. He has been design lead on projects as diverse as the Madrid Barajas Airport, Bordeaux Law Courts and Mossbourne Community Academy, London.



## Maggie's Centres are for anyone and everyone affected by cancer.

**Built in the grounds of NHS hospitals, Maggie's Centres offer a programme of support that has proven to strengthen physical and emotional wellbeing. They are places to find practical advice; places where qualified experts provide emotional support; friendly places to meet other people; or simply calming spaces to sit quietly.**

**Each Centre reintroduces architecture into the medical process but, unlike most hospital buildings, does so in a way that is 'non-prescriptive'; with mixed-use spaces that concentrate on the individual and social needs of visitors; a place where all are in it together: patients, carers, doctors, fund-raisers and those just there for a cup of tea.**

**The practical, emotional and social needs of the people Maggie's supports are represented expressively and creatively in a Centre's design. This leads to an architectural style of imaginative projection: something unusual and suggestive, something enigmatic and charged. But just as important as the openly expressive display is the inward-focused support, reflection and private conversation.**

**For Maggie's, architecture is a key part of the caring environment; each Centre is designed by a different architect but all start with the same brief: a small, welcoming building that places people first, increases human connectedness and makes visitors feel valued. Collectively, the Centres are an ongoing exponent of the beneficial effects of space and form and the positive relationship between architecture and wellbeing.**

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**Maggie's West London Centre; site and ground floor plan.**

This guide provides a personal walkthrough of the Centre, written by the architects who designed it. Follow the plan's line and read along with the explanation of the architecture, or use the guide to explore the welcoming environments at your own pace. The photographs - their location marked and numbered on the plan and in the text - correspond to key views outside and inside the building.

**Place:**  
London, England

**Date:**  
2001-2008

**Client:**  
Maggie's Centres

**Cost:**  
£2.1 million

**Gross Internal Area:**  
370m<sup>2</sup>

**Selected Awards:**  
RIBA Stirling Prize &  
Award for London, 2009;  
Civic Trust Award, 2009

**Architect:**  
Rogers Stirk Harbour  
& Partners

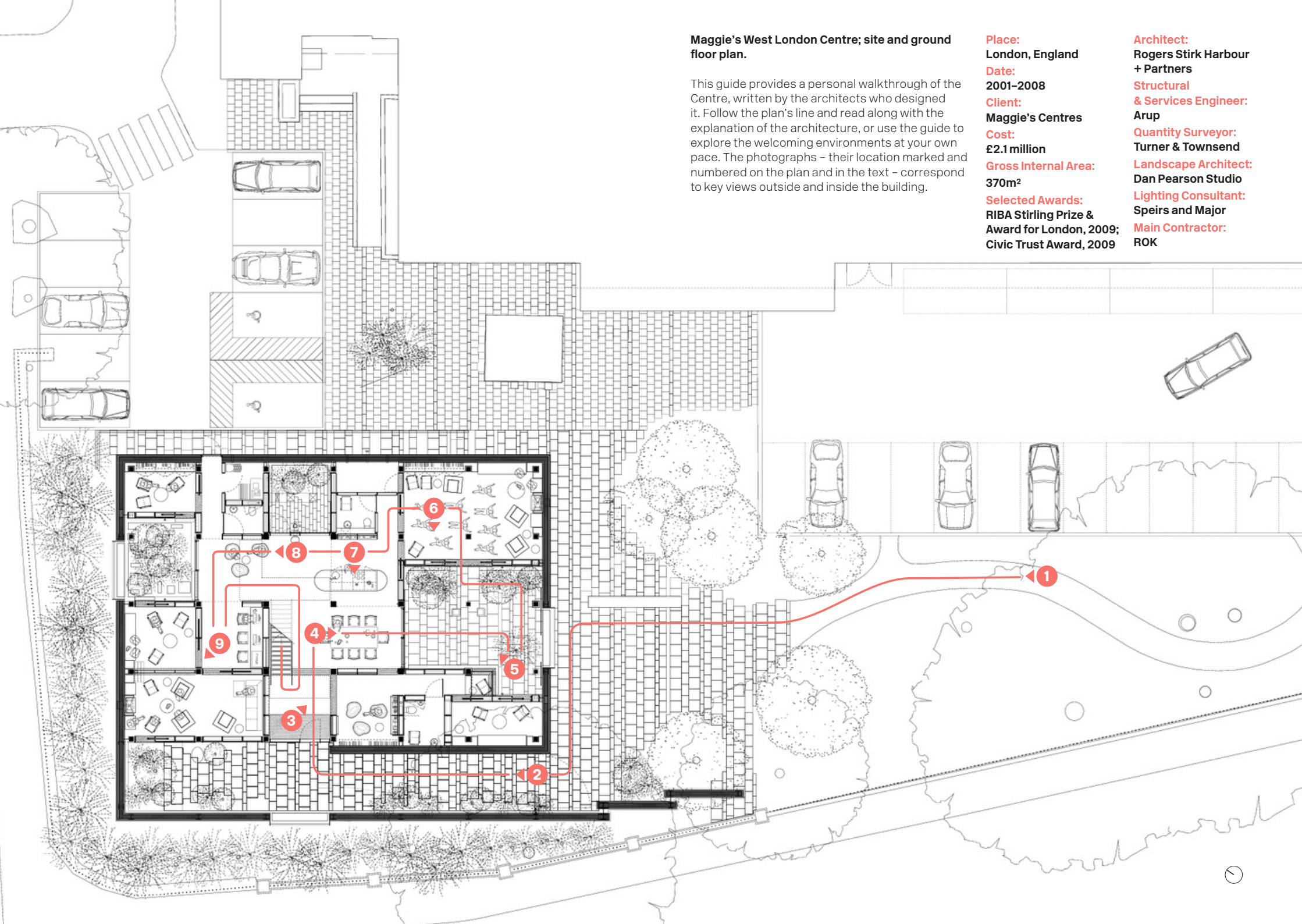
**Structural  
& Services Engineer:**  
Arup

**Quantity Surveyor:**  
Turner & Townsend

**Landscape Architect:**  
Dan Pearson Studio

**Lighting Consultant:**  
Speirs and Major

**Main Contractor:**  
ROK





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Maggie's West London Centre at Charing Cross Hospital in Hammersmith is surrounded by a collection of pink-stemmed birch trees that shield the building from a busy junction of the Fulham Palace Road. At first, the Centre is glimpsed as only walls of colour and a protecting canopy. Like a garden pavilion, it appears as a non-institutional building in a bustling, institutional environment. We approach it through the hospital grounds, enter between high walls and discover its heart – an open room, a kitchen table, a cup of tea.

A relatively small 'open house' arranged over two floors, the Centre was designed and built by Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners from 2001–8, led by senior partner Ivan Harbour. Fully accessible, flexible and adaptable – like every Maggie's Centre – it offers free practical, emotional and social support to people with cancer, and their family and friends.

The building is made up of five components: a boundary wall; a kitchen; small courtyards and gardens; flexible annexes; and a floating roof.

Together these elements abut, combine, offset and slide past one another to produce a seamless habitat that can inspire quiet hope and raise uncertain spirits.

From the street, the Centre's deep orange-red walls are shielded by the birches; the multi-stemmed trees form a moving, graphic display against the block colour. Moving closer, a curving path leads us to the Centre between old London plane trees, culminating in a verdant public courtyard. **1.** The long boundary wall – part protector and part defiant shout – is punctured by an opening; we look through to an internal garden and witness reflections, light and movement behind a double-height glass wall, giving hints of the welcoming space within.

Turning left from this window and following the pin-wheeling wall inwards, the entrance loggia is revealed. At this point, the architecture appears inward looking, almost defensive, turning its back on the city but the loggia, rustling with evergreen bamboos and punctuated by sculptures, ensures



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we feel welcomed. **2.** It acts like a filter, the greenery a natural cleanser oxygenating the air. The winding approach and elongated entrance are early hints of the building's labyrinthine nature – here it may simply echo an individual's journey, a pathway for a process of restoration.

Landscaping is a fundamental component of all Maggie's Centres. Designers Dan Pearson Studio have used the landscape to integrate the building into an urban site while also creating therapeutic environments.

We catch one last glimpse of the city, through a white glass screen opposite the building's front door. A flickering show of arboreal silhouettes and speeding traffic, the frosted window calls to mind a Far-Eastern animated scroll, set deep into the exterior wall bright with the orange-red of Imperial China.

When entering the building we make our final move from exterior to interior after a procession through spaces that mediate between these two conditions.

- 1. Approaching the Centre from the south, visitors are slowed by the garden path, meandering through the old London plane trees, in a landscape designed by Dan Pearson Studio.**
- 2. The entrance is bordered by orange-red walls; we move along the loggia, which operates like an external room, and pass beneath the overhanging roof punctured by louvred openings.**



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**3. An abundance of natural light flows into the main spaces. This is achieved by raising the roof above a ring of clerestory glazing and stopping the timber walls short of the ceilings.**

**4. The central area is a social living space; an open kitchen embodies a sense of home, assisted by its non-institutional touches, such as connections to the outside and an absence of signage.**

The tree-lined path, secluded courtyard, narrowing loggia and overhanging roof have all worked together to lead us towards the calming heart of the Maggie's Centre and subtly remove us from the atmosphere of the street and the hospital.

It is immediately clear that we are in a space much more domestic in scale and character than most buildings we attribute to healthcare. **3.** A palette of warm timber and smooth concrete soaks up the daylight that pours in from the two-storey glazing. Built-in cabinets and shelves act as partitions; the furniture and structure becoming interchangeable. With walls stopping short of full-height, the clerestory gap at the ceiling establishes a single, flowing space and links even the most private areas to the building's centre. A small library offers secluded seating to our right but we are drawn, as we would be when entering a home, to the kitchen and hearth at the building's heart.

A communal table **4.** completes the domestic nature of the central area and a lack of signage reiterates that this is not an institutional building.





Visitors are free to sit, chat, eat and drink together at the large table and, if the weather is bad, enjoy the largest of the three courtyard gardens through the double-height window. If the weather is good, however, we can slide back the door and explore the garden.

We have entered the southernmost – and also largest – of the three external courtyard gardens, each designed as extensions of the internal areas. **5.** These inner courtyards are planted with exotic architectural fauna to provide year-round interest. A horticulturist works with visitors on the maintenance of these gardens as a therapeutic activity, shown to have a positive effect on wellbeing.

Another space that shares access to this courtyard is the large sitting room – one of a wide variety of annexes, social rooms, private spaces or inglenooks. Entering via double doors to the outside, the large room is filled with soft furnishings but is robust and practical to handle a variety of uses. **6.** A key element of the Centre's design concept is its flexibility of space, to encourage

**5.** A sliding door leads to the garden and provides natural ventilation. Offering sunlight and shade, the garden is visually linked to the upper terraces, with both partially covered by the floating roof.

**6.** The large sitting room also faces the garden. Timber furnishings contrast with the concrete structure and this clarity aids in the flexibility of the space; it can easily change from a sitting area to an activity zone.



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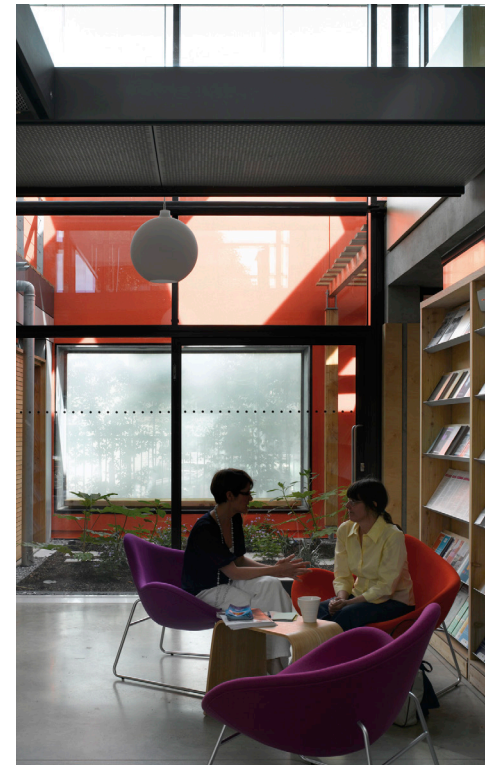
**7. Returning to the open central space we are increasingly aware of its flexibility; the communal areas have a lively domestic atmosphere.**

**8. Yet, in the same space, more intimate seating creates informal meeting places or areas for personal reflection.**

**9. Continuing this theme of flexibility, the private rooms, adjacent to the work area beneath the stairs, are bounded by sliding partitions that can transform the spaces for various events.**

people to be at home anywhere in the building, enabling a feeling of ownership rather than the sense that they are visitors. The design was conceived to make the building accessible, homely, personal and comfortable, with a layout that is open but incorporates varying degrees of private space.

Other examples of the more intimate, private rooms are to be found across from the double-height kitchen space on the building's southern side. The kitchen's position as the open heart of the building is further enhanced now we have experienced the juxtaposition of surrounding courtyard gardens, sitting rooms and more personal spaces. **7.** As we traverse the Centre we are moving towards, away from and adjacent to pockets of external space and natural light, areas of calm and of community. It is in this collection of zones that the complex journey required of a person affected by cancer is mimicked and complimented by the multi-layered nature of the centre itself. **8.** The shifting spaces change in use several times a week or even a day.



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The series of spaces on the north side of the Centre represent this changeability particularly well. After passing beneath the stairs we stand in a secluded work area, though views through the open stairs connect us back to the kitchen table and the main space. The corner behind us has two timber doors, one either side of its apex and each leading to a private room. However, these doors, the walls that house them and even the divisions between the two rooms, can be slid back and folded away. **9.** What was once a small lecture room has morphed into a studio for art therapy; a private consultation room has become a Tai Chi school.

We can end our tour by climbing the stairs to the open mezzanine level of office spaces and roof terraces. **10.** This raised storey brings us closer to the floating roof, where continuous clerestory glazing elevates the ceiling plane as it extends out over the wooden decks, populated with benches and aromatic herbs to be used in the kitchen. This work level is fully accessible – physically and visually – to all, ensuring staff remain in constant



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contact with life at the Centre. The birches provide a green canopy backdrop and the tree tops themselves are imitated in louvred openings that puncture the lightweight steel roof. Each opening filters dappled light down through every level of the building, much like a protective forest canopy.

The Centre can be many things to many people: open house, rest stop, learning centre, thinking space or social hub. This flexibility of use is the result of careful consideration and a balance of overlapping spaces and programmes. Even our first impression of the Centre as a 'garden pavilion' is a construct of the architecture. Through its five core elements, and as a consequence of an overbearing site, the building creates its own environment or 'garden', placing itself as a 'pavilion' within an outer wall; a gatehouse providing space and relief.

More simply put, this Centre, like every other, is a warm and welcoming place where professional staff are on hand to offer the support people need to find their way through cancer.



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**10. The mezzanine level is free of partitions to allow for unencumbered views to the ground level and out to the terraces and tree tops beyond. This is direct contrast to the more inward-focused main floor.**

**You are always welcome to come to a Maggie's Centre to ask any questions or just to look around. Pop in, meet the team and have a cup of tea.**

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

Maggie's Centres, 2nd Floor, Palace Wharf, Rainville Road, London W6 9HN

[www.maggiescentres.org](http://www.maggiescentres.org)

**For more information on RSHP and this design guide, please contact: Tom Wright, Publications Manager; [tom.w@rsh-p.com](mailto:tom.w@rsh-p.com)**

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