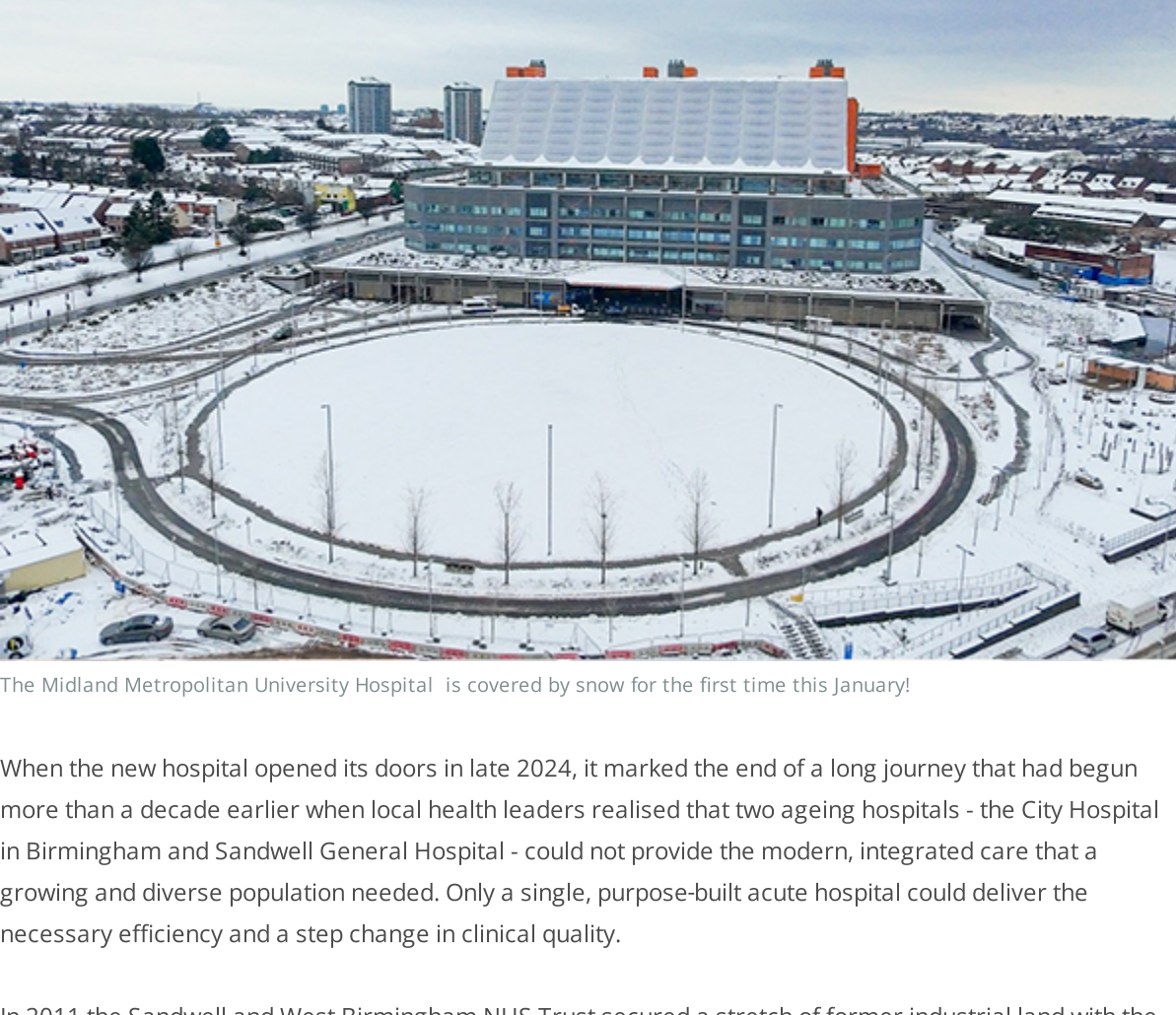




Hope your year is off to a great start! We wanted to wish you a belated Happy New Year and take this opportunity to reflect on the completion of The **Midland Metropolitan University Hospital** in Sandwell, Birmingham one of the UK's most significant healthcare developments and one of our proudest achievements.



The Midland Metropolitan University Hospital is covered by snow for the first time this January!

When the new hospital opened its doors in late 2024, it marked the end of a long journey that had begun more than a decade earlier when local health leaders realised that two ageing hospitals - the City Hospital in Birmingham and Sandwell General Hospital - could not provide the modern, integrated care that a growing and diverse population needed. Only a single, purpose-built acute hospital could deliver the necessary efficiency and a step change in clinical quality.

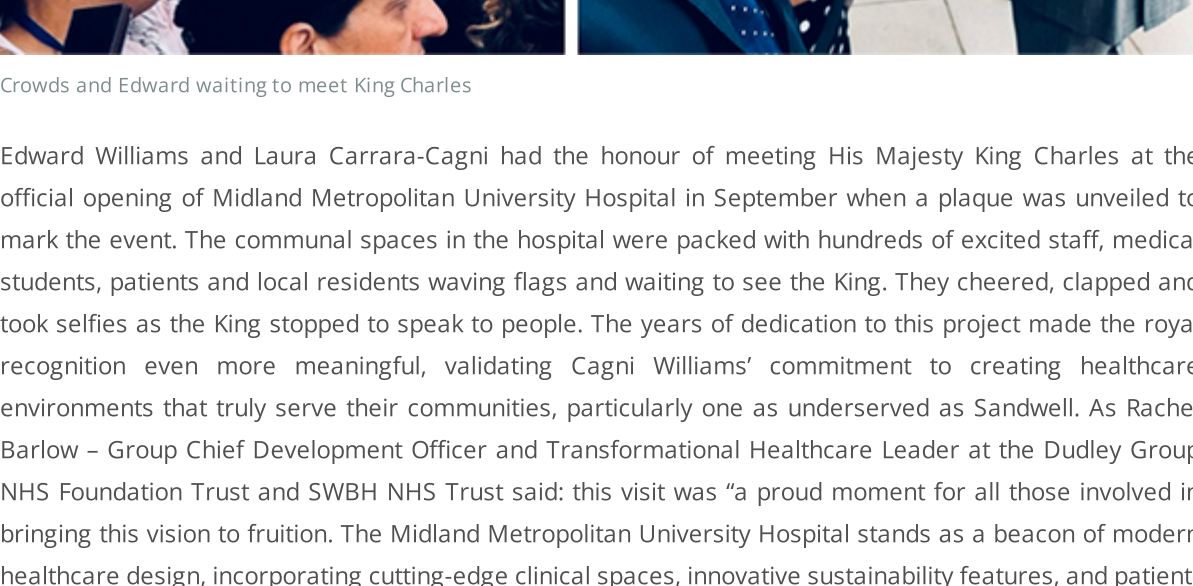
In 2011 the Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust secured a stretch of former industrial land with the potential to become something transformative. The vision was for a state-of-the-art acute hospital that would anchor a wider health campus, spark regeneration, and act as a catalyst for jobs, education, and community wellbeing. To our great joy, we were selected to lead the design team for this extraordinary project.

Twelve exciting and challenging years later, the vision became reality when the new hospital became fully operational. 2205 was a momentous year for everyone involved. For us at Cagni Williams Associates, for the dedicated staff who bring the building to life each day, and for The Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, the hospital is the culmination of years of planning, design excellence, and unwavering commitment to delivering world-class healthcare facilities for the local community.

The significance of this achievement was underscored in September 2025 when His Majesty King Charles officially opened the state-of-the-art facility.

We are particularly honoured that Cagni Williams Associates has received two fabulous awards for our design work on the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital. These accolades represent industry recognition of our achievement and validate our design philosophy of creating healing spaces that support staff wellbeing, enhance patient outcomes, serve as sustainable, future-ready facilities for generations to come, and regenerate the surrounding area.

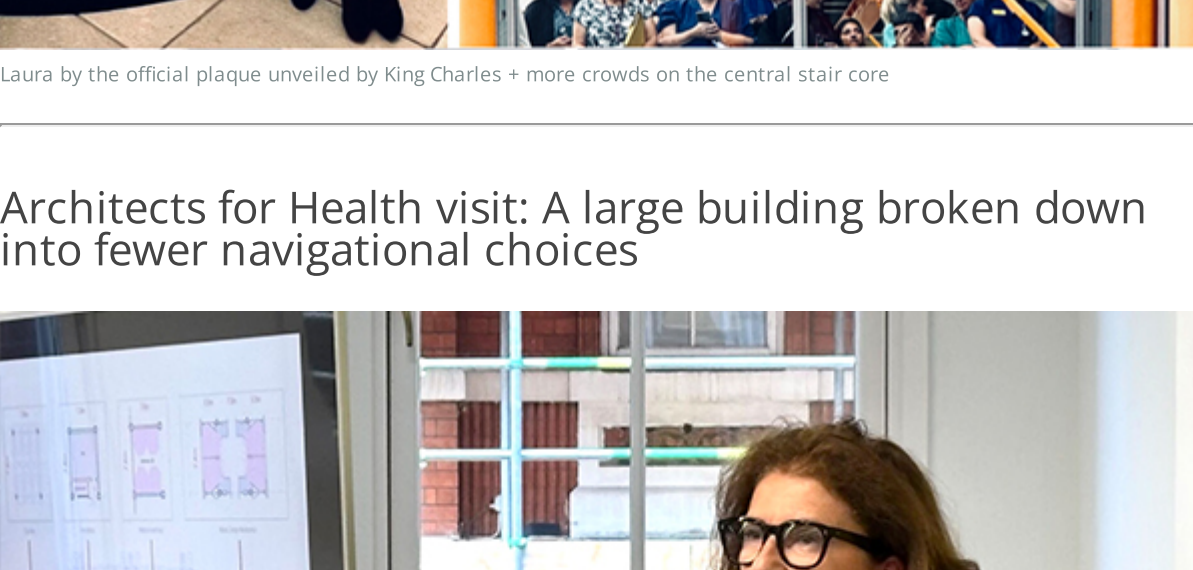
His Majesty King Charles: a historic moment



Crowds and Edward waiting to meet King Charles

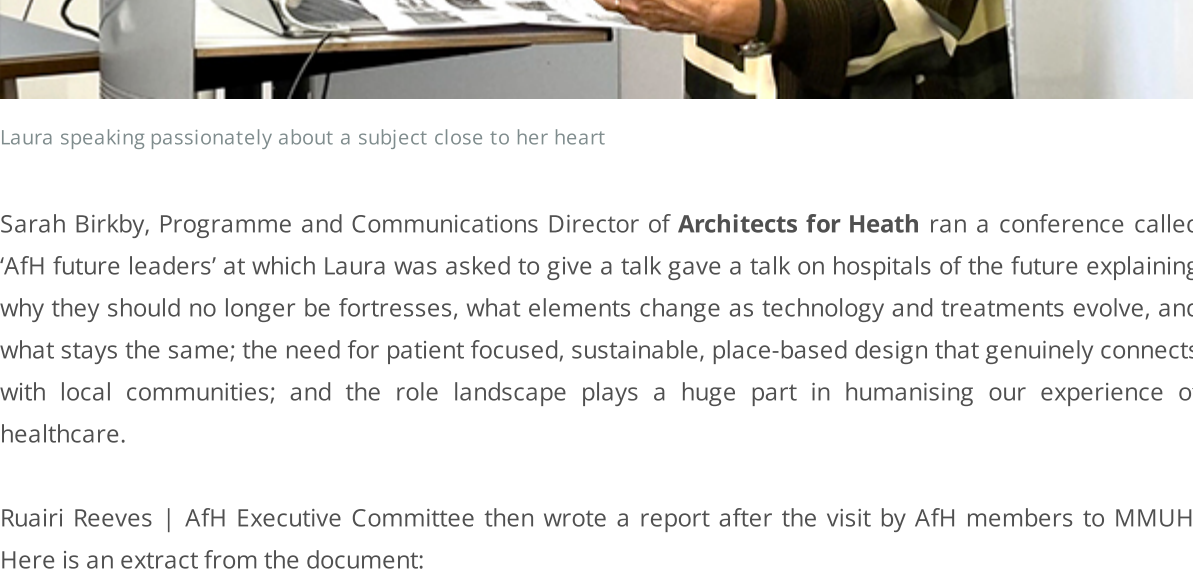
Edward Williams and Laura Carrara-Cagni had the honour of meeting His Majesty King Charles at the official opening of Midland Metropolitan University Hospital in September when a plaque was unveiled to mark the event. The communal spaces in the hospital were packed with hundreds of excited staff, medical students, patients and local residents waving flags and waiting to see the King. They cheered, clapped and took selfies as the King stopped to speak to people. The years of dedication to this project made the royal recognition even more meaningful, validating Cagni Williams' commitment to creating healthcare environments that truly serve their communities, particularly one as underserved as Sandwell. As Rachel Barlow - Group Chief Development Officer and Transformational Healthcare Leader at the Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust and SWBH NHS Trust said: this visit was "a proud moment for all those involved in bringing this vision to fruition. The Midland Metropolitan University Hospital stands as a beacon of modern healthcare design, incorporating cutting-edge clinical spaces, innovative sustainability features, and patient-centred design principles throughout."

An historic moment - truly unforgettable!



Laura by the official plaque unveiled by King Charles + more crowds on the central stair core

Architects for Health visit: A large building broken down into fewer navigational choices



Laura speaking passionately about a subject close to her heart

Sarah Birkby, Programme and Communications Director of **Architects for Health** ran a conference called 'AfH future leaders' at which Laura was asked to give a talk about hospitals of the future explaining why they should no longer be fortresses, what elements change as technology and treatments evolve, and what stays the same; the need for patient focused, sustainable, place-based design that genuinely connects with local communities; and the role landscape plays a huge part in humanising our experience of healthcare.

Ruairi Reeves | AfH Executive Committee then wrote a report after the visit by AfH members to MMUH. Here is an extract from the document:

Design Concept: *How many large hospitals have you entered with a maze of long, heavily signposted corridors? How many hospitals have you found yourself wondering where the entrance is, relative to where you managed to park your car? The "Midland Met" is a refreshingly direct expression of its stacking diagram, roughly: Ground > Car Park > Hot clinical floors > Public Areas > Wards. Simply drive in and take a lift to the main concourse, no expanse of car park, no long walks. Like taking a ferry: park on the lower floors then head up to the main deck. Taking the lift from the Public Entrance, all the way up to the 5th Floor's main public areas at first caused a double-take amongst our group, had we read the very clear signage correctly? However, once you arrive at the vast winter garden, this makes a lot of sense. Located more centrally within the hospital, you are close to and can see directly where you need to go. A large building, broken down into fewer navigational choices.*

Great to receive the praise of our peers!

ULI Europe Award for Excellence



Laura with Dan Ringerstein judge and award presenter, and Simone Santi, award chair, in Paris

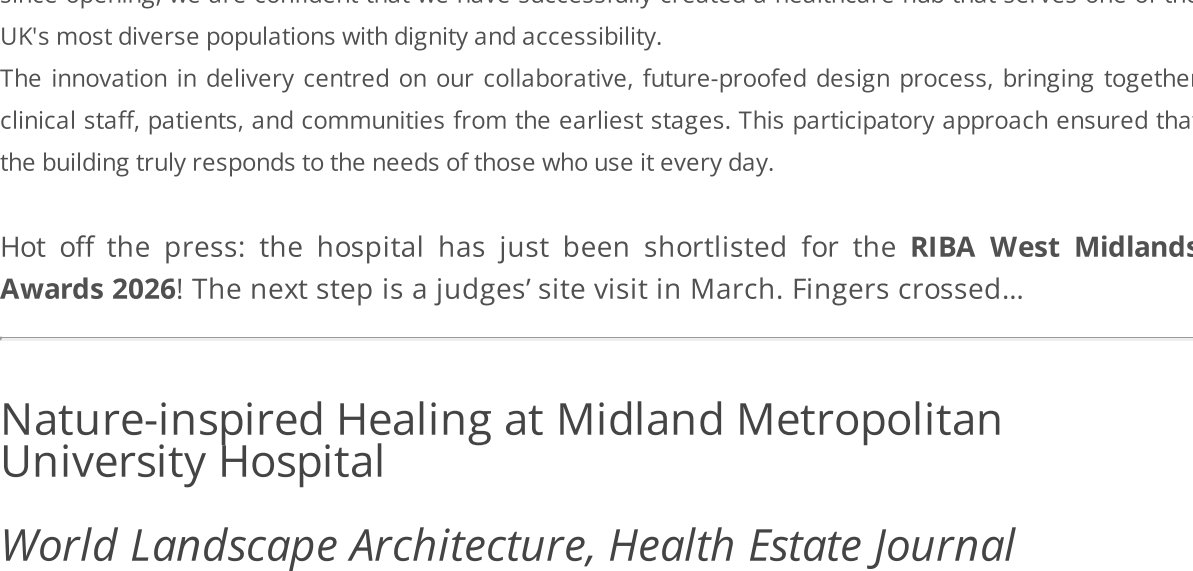
At the end of November, Laura Carrara-Cagni travelled to Paris for the ULI Europe Awards ceremony. Our fingers were firmly crossed, as we had been shortlisted amongst some exceptional projects. Then came a truly remarkable moment: Midland Metropolitan University Hospital was awarded the ULI Europe Award for Excellence, one of only four international winners. The jury recognised groundbreaking innovation on multiple levels - a hospital designed not merely from the inside out, but from the outside in, making it a catalyst for wider regeneration. In the jury's words, arriving at the hospital is "an **uplifting experience**". They noted:

"We have visited it, and the staff explained it with such heart and energy. It's really fantastic when people talk about their project and describe it with genuine emotion, energy, and tremendous pride."

See the **video**. This recognition validates our fundamental belief that healthcare architecture can serve as a genuine community asset, particularly in areas where thoughtful design can make the greatest impact. MMUH demonstrates that sustainable design encompasses not just environmental performance, but social sustainability - creating spaces that genuinely enhance community life whilst regenerating the surrounding area. The building operates as more than just a hospital - it is a community hub that supports residents, provides a positive working environment for healthcare staff, and creates healing spaces for patients. MMUH embodies our vision of what hospitals can be: open, transparent buildings that welcome rather than intimidate. By creating spaces that reduce stress and promote wellbeing for all users, the building supports both patient recovery and staff retention whilst serving broader community needs.

Our proudest achievement was creating and delivering a 4,000 square metre winter garden - not included in the original brief - within the existing budget. This community space has become a natural meeting point where local residents gather to meet for coffee or something to eat, functioning independently of the hospital's medical services. The hospital employs a single structural grid suitable for clinical areas, wards, and parking alike, creating a fully flexible building capable of adapting to changing needs over decades of service.

Building Better Healthcare Awards 2025



Award ceremony

Then in November at the **Building Better Healthcare Awards 2025** - honouring innovators across the building and healthcare sector- The Midland Metropolitan University Hospital won Best Healthcare Development over £75 million. As the awards organisers note:

"From cutting-edge digital health deployments to patient-centred design and sustainable estate management, this year's winners demonstrated an inspiring commitment to innovation, social value, and clinical excellence."

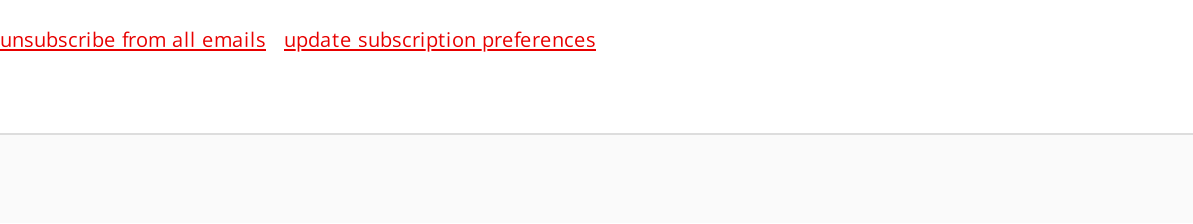
This 690-bed acute care facility redefines healthcare architecture through its integrated design approach, combining clinical functionality with patient-centred spaces that promote healing and wellbeing. The building provides essential indoor and outdoor gardens for both patients and staff, whilst simultaneously becoming a beacon for Sandwell and a catalyst for the area's much-needed regeneration. As a technically focused practice, we embraced the challenge of delivering highly complex infrastructure from the outset. We were acutely conscious of the community impact throughout the design process. Now, more than a year since opening, we are confident that we have successfully created a healthcare hub that serves one of the UK's most diverse populations with dignity and accessibility.

The innovation in delivery centred on our collaborative, future-proofed design process, bringing together clinical staff, patients, and communities from the earliest stages. This participatory approach ensured that the building truly responds to the needs of those who use it every day.

Hot off the press: the hospital has just been shortlisted for the **RIBA West Midlands Awards 2026!** The next step is a judges' site visit in March. Fingers crossed...

Nature-inspired Healing at Midland Metropolitan University Hospital

World Landscape Architecture, Health Estate Journal



Finally we would like to highlight the biophilic (designs that connects people with nature) aspect of the design, and the extremely important role nature this plays in patient recovery and staff well-being. We would like to thank **World Landscape Architecture** for Damian Holmes' article: "Nature-Inspired Healing at Midland Metropolitan University Hospital" and the inspiring landscape architecture designed by Grant Associates for MMUH.

In the November 2025 edition of **Health Estate Journal**, Laura was asked to write an article entitled 'Biophilic spaces for mental health and wellbeing' where she pointed out that the UK stands at a pivotal moment in healthcare design. Central to this is the integration of biophilic design principles that prioritise mental health and psychological wellness alongside clinical excellence and makes the argument that, in an era of rising mental health challenges and healthcare worker burnout, nature-connected design offers evidence-based solutions that support both clinical outcomes and human flourishing.

What a year that was! As we enter 2026, we look forward to seeing this remarkable facility continue to serve the community and set new standards for healthcare architecture across the United Kingdom.

Midland Metropolitan University Hospital Architects are HKS, Cagni Williams and Sonnemann Toon.

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