

Princetown News

Beyond Punishment: Designing a Humane Model for Incarceration

Rethinking Youth Rehabilitation

The conceptual project responds to the growing concerns of the Justice System in the UK. Focusing on juvenile offenders, it imagines a campus-style site with its ethos rooted in rehabilitation, education and well-being. Set on the historic site of HM Prison Dartmoor, Princetown, the campus functions more like a boarding school than a traditional prison.

HM Prison Dartmoor, which currently sits vacant in Princetown, is known for a history of containment, isolation and punishment. Since its opening in 1806, it has held hundreds of adult male prisoners; originally constructed to hold the rapidly growing numbers of prisoners of war, it later became a Category C Prison for men. Now, Harriette Lillian Design is proposing a radical take on the traditional prison, challenging its legacy by replacing the large imposing buildings with an open campus-style network of smaller buildings spread across the site. These include educational facilities, rehabilitation and counselling spaces, as well as accommodation for up to 200 Pupils.

Focusing less on revenge and more on rehabilitation and education, the College is vastly different to what we are used to seeing and hearing about in the UK, yet such a drastic change may be just what we need.

The justice system in the UK is facing growing challenges, with issues such as overcrowding, harsh correctional environments and high rates of re offending, causing a strain on the system and all those involved.



Princetown College Crest

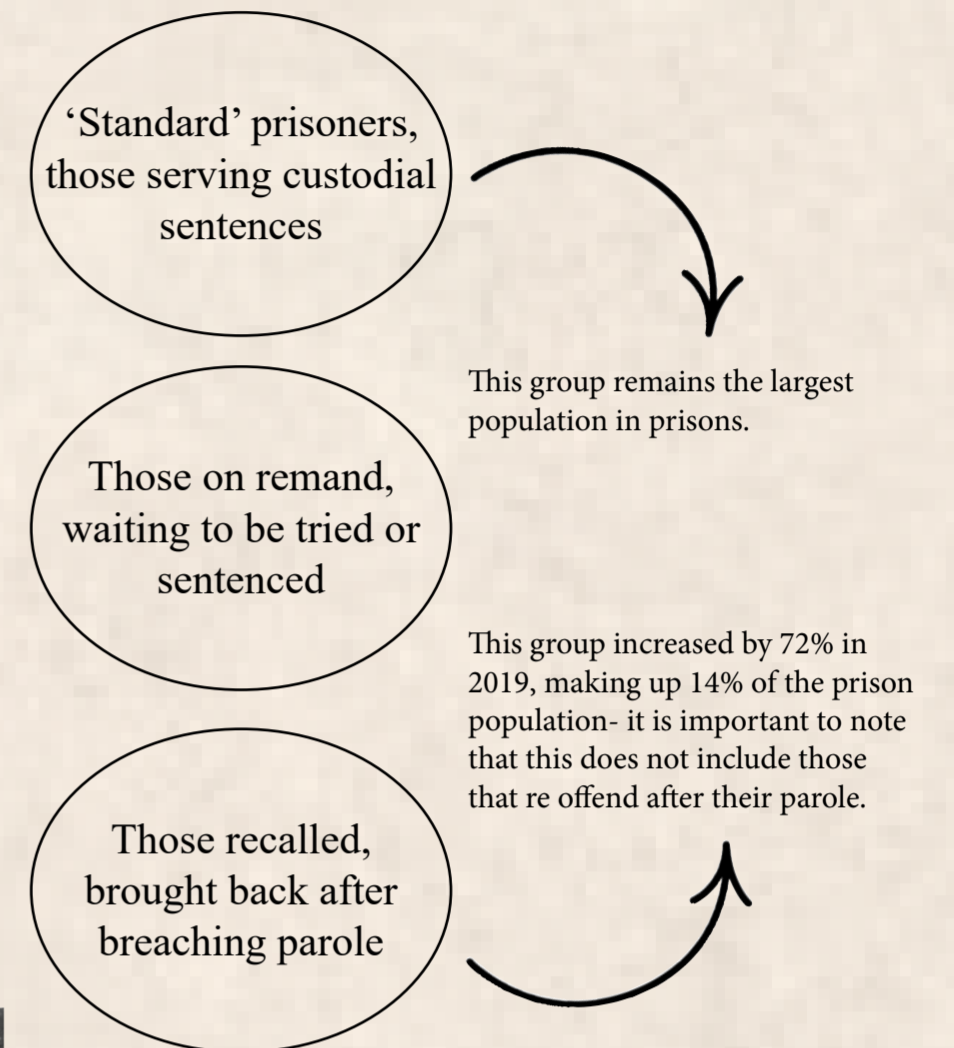


HM Prison Dartmoor operated for over 200 years, this proposal retains the historic boundary walls, while transforming the site into a space centred on rehabilitation.

Breaking the Cycle

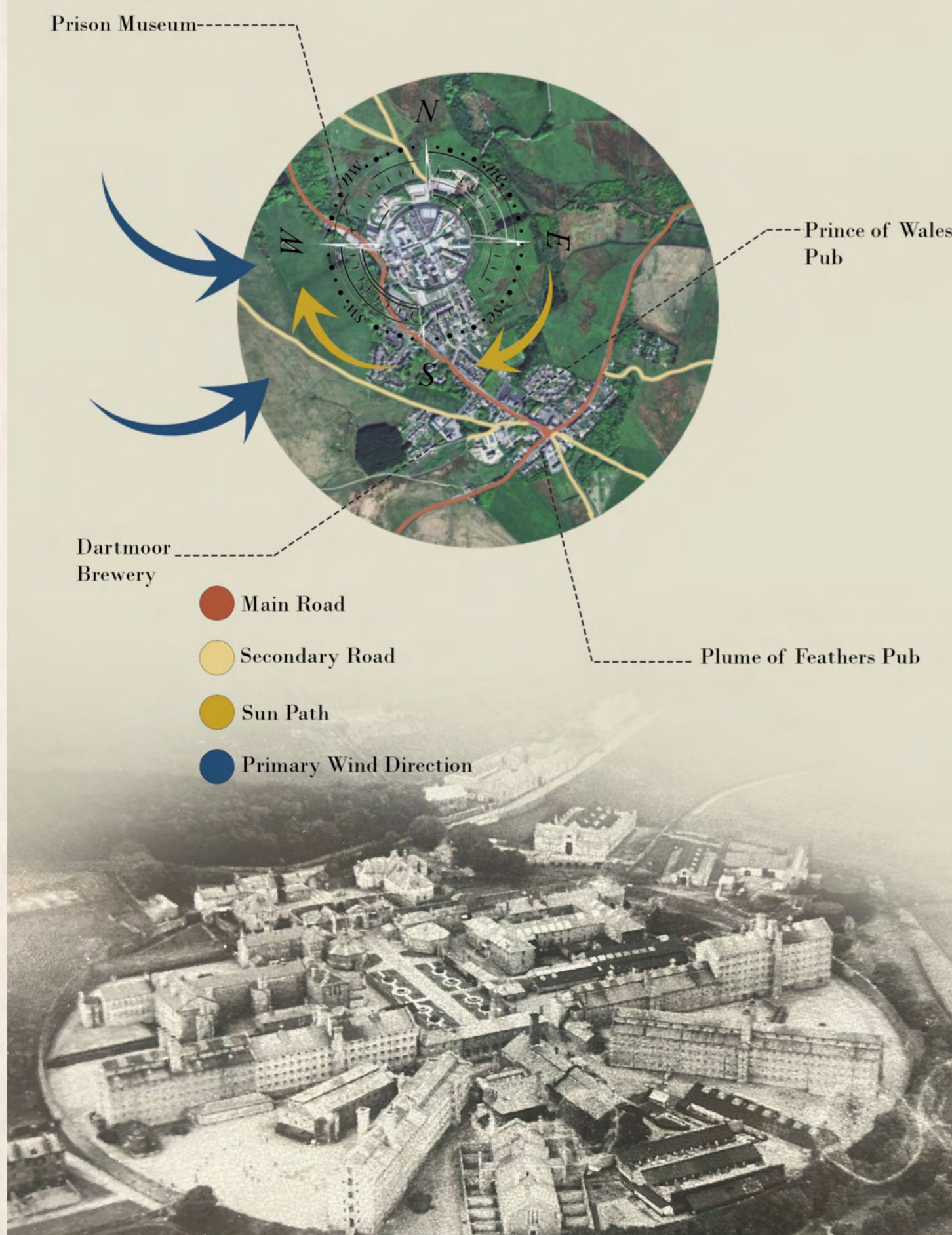
“Prisons are in a profound state of crisis,”- The first line of a 2024 report on the Institute for Government Page. Miss Rossall told us that her design had to be backed by extensive research, in order to fully grasp a sensitive topic such as this, she felt it important to understand exactly why change was needed.

Types of Prisoners-



There are many factors involved in this prison crisis and it will be difficult to improve the system in one hit, it will be a gradual process where factors may need to be addressed individually at first. This site is approaching the crisis from one possible angle- making a change at the rehabilitation stage of imprisonment, in order to reduce the rate of re offence, and in turn reducing the prison population.

Dartmoor Prison Site Analysis



Site Analysis

“ Universal health coverage may only be achieved by leaving no one behind”

Miss Rossall noted, ‘it is clear that there is a significant lack of care in our system, in the document she read there was a statement that stood out to me- “Universal health coverage may only be achieved by leaving no one behind”- I want this College to be centred around care, these are people, children, and they our need help.

Princetown College

Location- Princetown, Devon

Site Area- 12 Hectares

Capacity- 200 Pupils

Age Range- 10-17

Inspiration- Halden Prison, Norway

Design Approach- Rehabilitation through education, nature, care and design

Some of the facilities Miss Rossall has designed include-

- Multiple counselling rooms offering one-to-one support
- Sensory spaces and connections to nature
- Family rooms to promote re socialisation
- A variety of classrooms to cater for each pupil
- ‘Village’ style housing split into age groups to encourage socialisation while maintaining security

Why Dartmoor?

Existing Perimeter and secure boundary

Strong local identity

Historic significance

Symbolic transformation of former prison

Access to nature

Rewriting the Past

Using HM Prison Dartmoor as the site for this new College is symbolic and powerful, the project engages directly with the history of Dartmoor Prison without erasing it, instead reinterpreting it. Traces of the past are still visible, the tall granite boundary walls remain, along with the recognisable gatehouse, but the imposing buildings crammed around the site are replaced by the dispersed smaller buildings linked by stone walkways and hidden within the replanted forestry.

This project was heavily inspired by Halden Prison in Norway, known as the World’s most humane prison, the centre has provided a successful example of architecture having a positive impact on health and well being. The use of The chosen location for the site is significant to a project of this nature; the unpredictable and unforgiving terrain of Dartmoor contradicts the idea of a brighter and changed correctional environment, yet the surrounding landscape plays an active role in the rehabilitation process.

“ I want this college to be centred around care, these are people, children, and they need our help.”

Connections to outdoor spaces are prioritised and integrated into the daily routine of pupils as well as staff. Miss Rossall is a firm believer in the positive impact of nature and natural environments on mental health and well being, and this is apparent throughout the site and the design decisions she has made.

Whole Site

Harriette Rossall, from the leading design company behind this new school, said: 'I believe our society is stuck in the past, when we think of prisons we imagine dark, cold cells with little light and imposing iron bars', she later went on to say that if we created a place where the purpose of holding the criminal changed from punishment to education, we would not be turning out as many re offenders.

The College, with its focus on juvenile offenders, imagines a campus-style secure site that functions more like a boarding school than a typical prison. Typical custodial environments, that have a lack of rehabilitation and supportive facilities, tend to reinforce negative behaviour, and young offenders are among the most likely to suffer from the exposure of bad behaviour and criminal activities, leading to high rates of re offence.

At the core of this project and the ethos of this College is a shift in philosophy- from incarceration to rehabilitation. Where traditional prison layouts restrict movement and prioritise surveillance, this site explores how architecture can be used to shape a supportive environment. Residential 'villages' replace cell blocks, creating a feeling of community in the shared-living environments that mirror boarding school life. Education is embedded into the daily routine of a student here; classrooms, workshops and plenty of study spaces, provide the necessary education needed for life. The classrooms are located in the heart of the site, central in spatial design as well as in purpose, acknowledging the correlation between social and psychological factors in childhood and youth offending.

Security, while still present, is more subtle than in a typical prison, Miss Rossall noted that security was still a necessary factor to consider, and one she initially struggled to integrate into the design, 'this is a correctional facility and the pupils will still need to be monitored and supervised, not for just for the safety of the staff and the other pupils, but for themselves too', but despite being necessary, it felt hard to justify, 'I didn't want to have a CCTV system set up across the site, in all the classrooms, along every corridor, it feels imposing and intrusive, how can we expect these pupils to trust us if we don't, in turn, trust them?', Miss Rossall decided to rely heavily on natural surveillance and carefully positioned buildings in order to avoid a feeling of oppression and lack of privacy.

Princetown College is redefining incarceration, it imagines a positive environment centred around care, learning and understanding.

State of Mind

Miss Rossall has been heavily influenced by Halden Prison in Norway- deemed 'The World's most Humane Prison'.

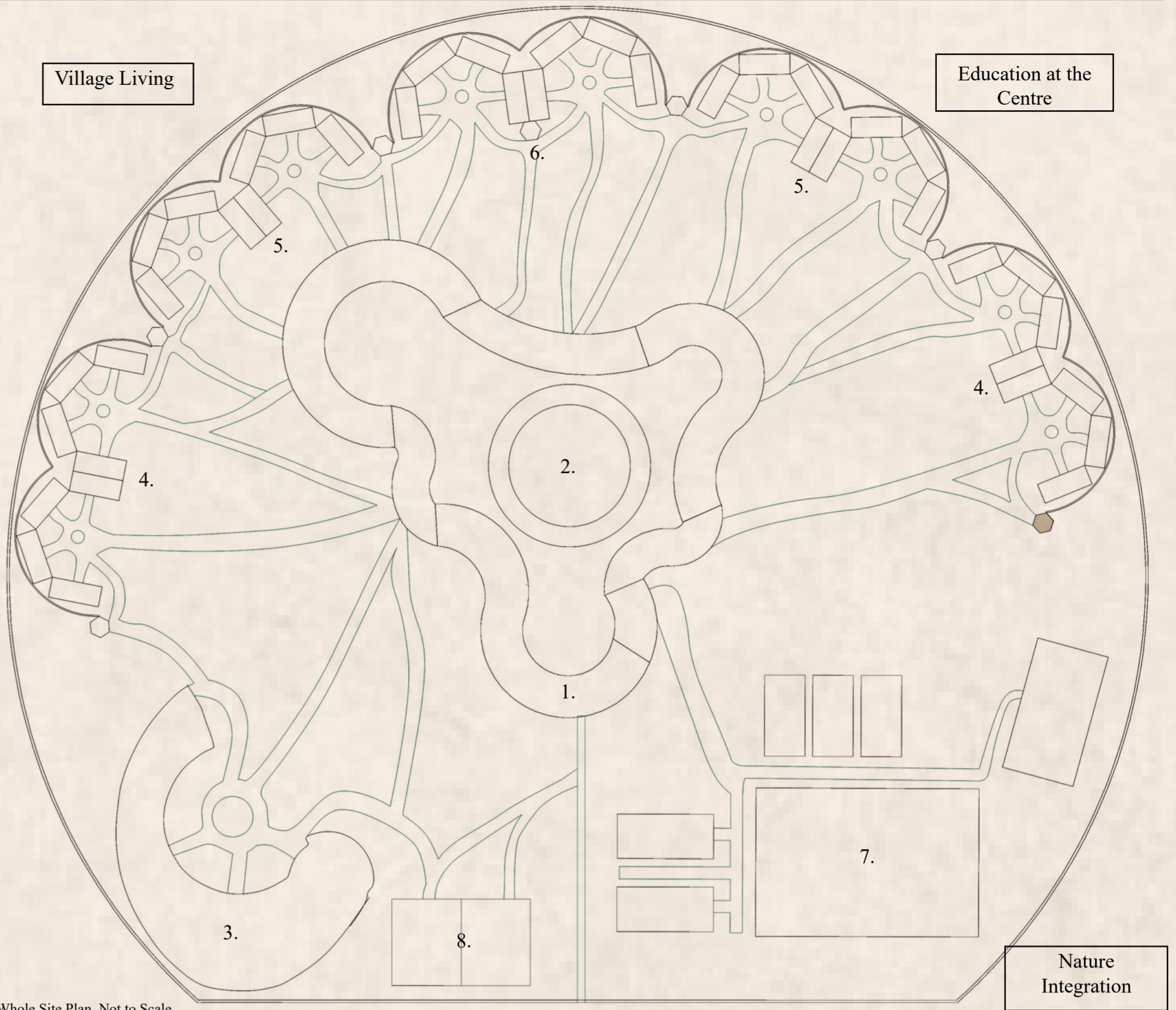
'Halden Prison has been a guiding study from the beginning of this project, their campus-style layout inspired my final site plan, and the positive attitude that the staff and inmates possess is admirable.'

The success of the Norwegian Prison model is undeniable, Norway's society understands the importance of preparing offenders for their eventual release back into society. Miss Rossall wants this understanding to reach farther than Scandinavian Countries- 'How can we expect a prisoner to slip back into society with ease when they have only known crime, prison and punishment?'

During the research stage of the project, Miss Rossall found a book written by Jessica Berens, writer-in-residence at Dartmoor Prison. A quote very early on in the novel demonstrates the UK's mentality towards prisons perfectly-

"At its core, we have a system which relies on two great simplicities- that we can detect the crimes which are committed and that we can deter criminals by punishing them. Those simplicities happen to have all the intellectual insight of a drunkard in a dark alley."

And another passage that remained in Miss Rossall's mind for the duration of this project- "It is completely understandable that public opinion wants to punish offenders. Anybody who is a victim of a crime- or who imagines what it would be like to be one- feels angry, want to hurt the bastard who hurt them. But human feelings are not necessarily a reliable guide to effective policy. What is more important? Getting angry or cutting crime?"



Whole Site Plan, Not to Scale



Main Building GA Plan, Not to Scale

The HM Prison Dartmoor walls remain, yet the original buildings have been replaced, and the whole site re-planted and rearranged to create the campus-style layout.

- 1. Main building-
 - » Reception
 - » Family apartments
 - » Counselling Rooms
 - » Sensory Room
 - » Accessible Apartments
 - » Kitchen
 - » Staff Mess

- 2. Library Building-
 - » Dining Hall
 - » Classrooms
 - » Library
 - » Indoor Garden

- 3. Secure Building-
 - » 46 Secure Bedrooms
 - » Staff offices
 - » Counselling Rooms

- 4. 16-17 Age Group Hexagons-
 - » 2 Bedrooms
 - » Living and Kitchen Space
 - » Bathroom
 - » Greenhouse

- 5. 13-15 Age Group Hexagons-
 - » 4 Beds in 2 Bedrooms
 - » Living and Kitchenette Space
 - » Bathroom
 - » Greenhouse

- 6. 10-12 Age Group Hexagons-
 - » 8 Beds
 - » Bathroom with 2 toilets and 2 showers
 - » Living Space

- 7. Sports Facilities-
 - » Sports Hall
 - » Multi-purpose astro
 - » Tennis Courts
 - » Padel Courts

- 8. Workshops

A Typical Day at Princetown College
08:00 - Breakfast
09:00 - Tutor Registration
09:30 - Lessons or Workshops
12:30 - Lunch
13:30 - Lessons or Workshops
15:30 - Sport and Recreation / Outdoor Activities
17:00 - Counselling Opportunities
18:30 - Dinner
20:00 - Study / Socialising Time
21:30 - Rooms / Villages

60% of those released in the UK re offend, in Norway it is only 20%

Norwegian Prisons operate at a 74% capacity, in the UK it is 104%

64% of Brits view Norway's system as too soft

- Why is the Norwegian Model Better?
- » Rehabilitation over punishment
 - » Normalised daily routines
 - » Staff-prisoner relationships are stronger
 - » Education is the focus and programmes are stronger
 - » Preparation for release from day one
 - » After Care

"What is more important? Getting angry or cutting crime?"

From Cells to Clusters

The accommodation strategy is far from the typical, institutional, uniform living, instead Miss Rossall has been inspired by nature's engineering wonder- Honeycomb- to create modular units.

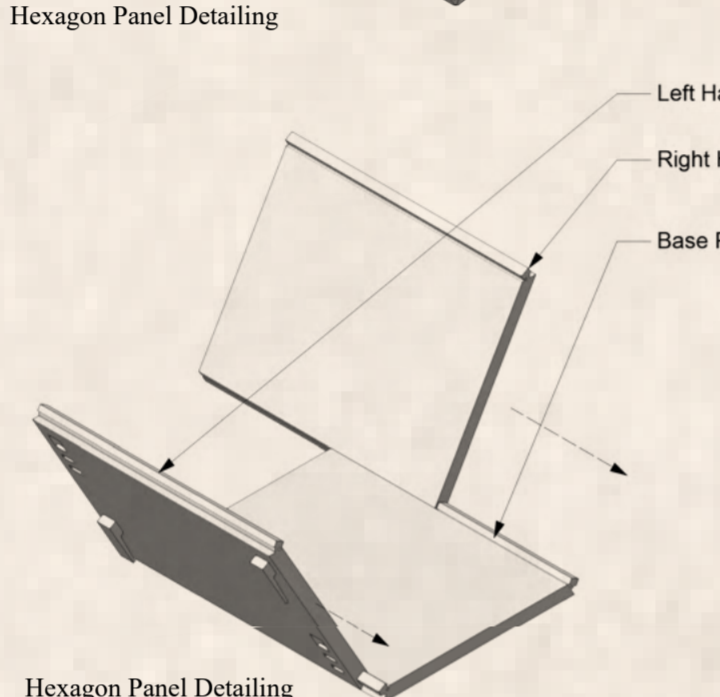
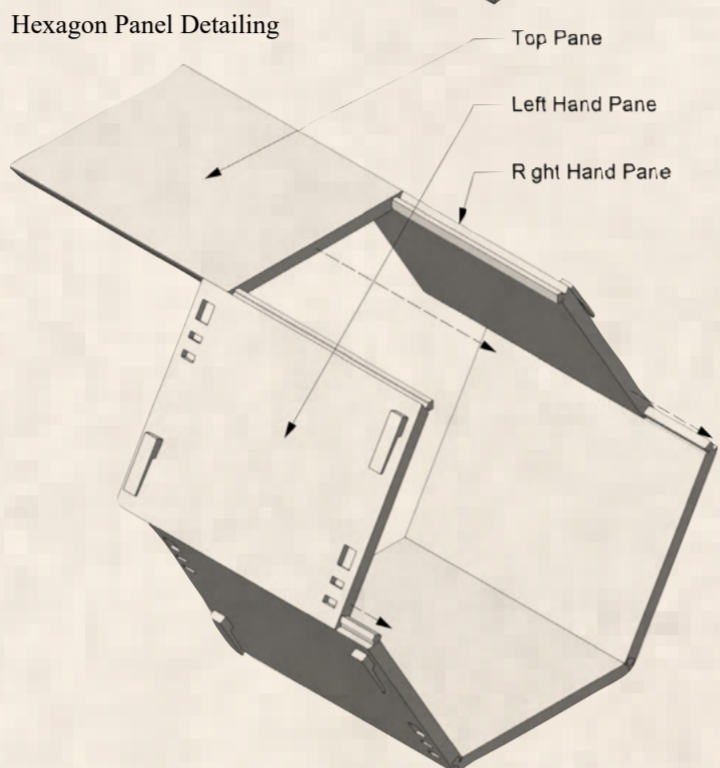
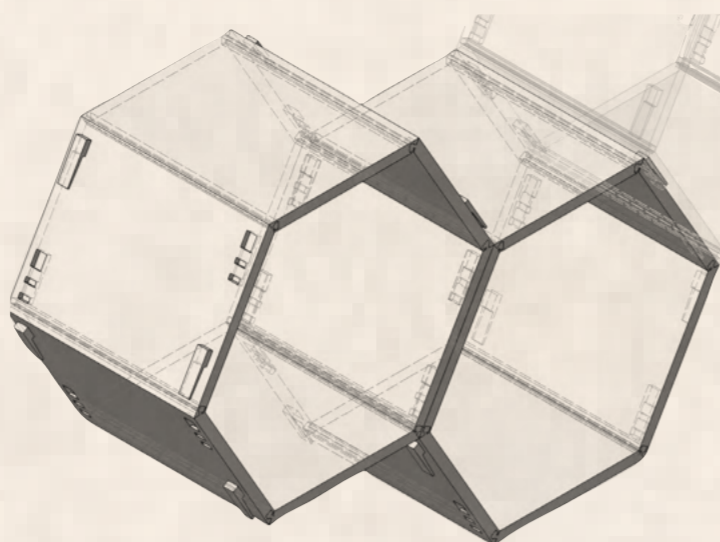
Miss Rossall's aim was to create adaptable and modular housing that is softened by the hexagon shape inspired by nature- 'I am very interested in modular design, I have looked into various case studies such as the famous Metabolist Movement that occurred in post-war Japan, as well as designs for Emergency housing, where quick builds and modular layouts are essential'.

'I wanted to design an equally durable and adaptable unit; by using the hexagon shape I have the option of disassembling each panel in order to flat pack them for delivery'.

The units are organised into a series of modular 'clusters', that are grouped to form small communities or 'villages', each split depending on age. Miss Rossall designed the units to cater for each age group- 10-12, 13-15 and 16-17 years. The number of room mates decreases as you get older to encourage independence and also provide more privacy.

The layout-

- Age 10-12
 - Dorm style housing, 8 pupils in one unit, large living space, bathroom with two toilets and two showers.
- Age 13-15
 - 4 pupils to a unit, 2 pupils in one room, desk space, living space as well as small kitchenette, bathroom with one toilet and shower.
- Age 16-17
 - 2 pupils to a unit, separate rooms, shared living space and bathroom, fully equipped kitchen.



Hexagon Panel Detailing

Not One-Size-Fits-All

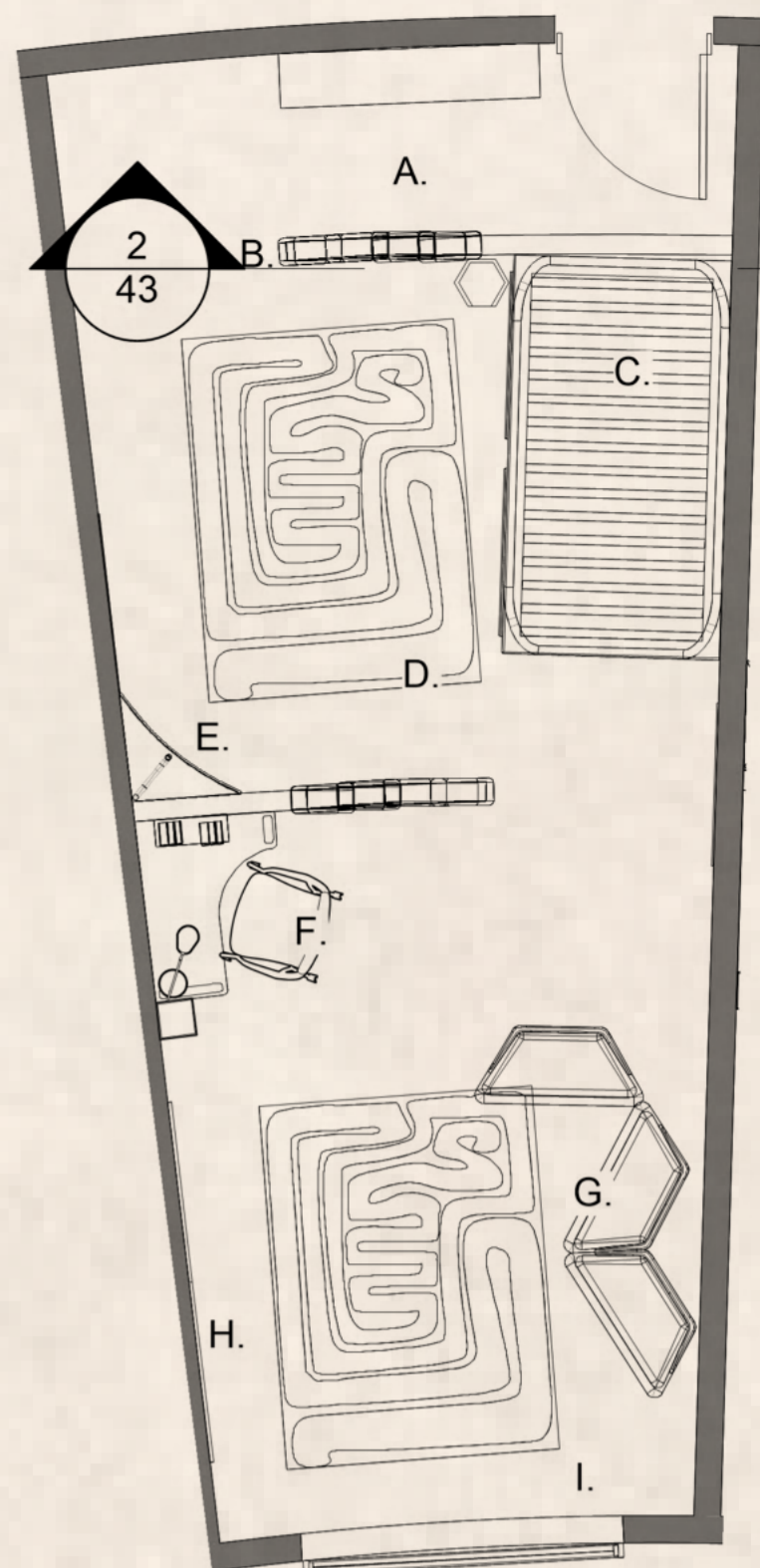
The design has adopted a neurodiversity-informed approach, spaces are carefully organised to support a range of cognitive and sensory experiences. After an interview with a prison officer who noted that the prison population is much younger and a higher percentage has neurodiverse needs, Miss Rossall conducted research into how a designer can play a role in providing a space suitable for all.

'I read that, "Neurodiversity is a way of saying that human brains are different from each other. This is a biological fact. No two brains (or nervous systems) are the same", and I wanted this college to address that'. When designing a space, Miss Rossall wanted to take these factors into account, 'when designing rooms and classrooms, I want to think of the sensory stimulation, spatial transitions and way finding, and adaptability of the space.' She noted that designing for all needs doesn't mean stripping a room of personality, it means allowing a room to be personalised.

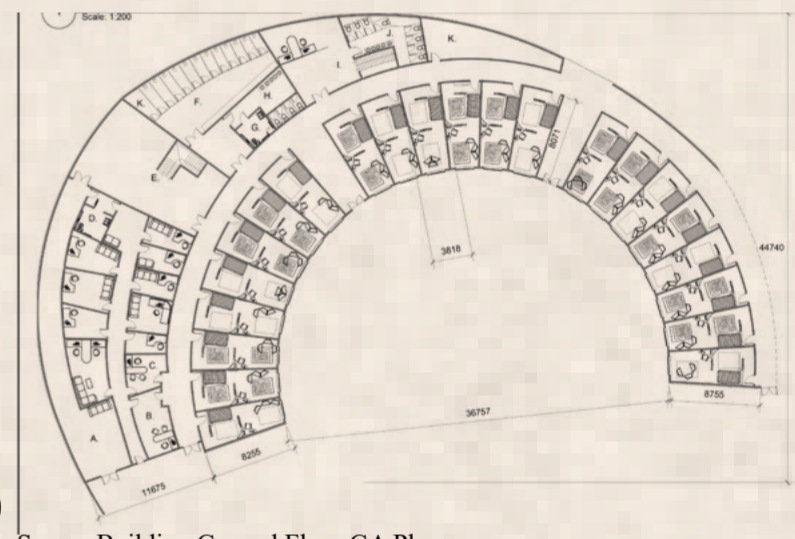
The secure rooms are designed to be adaptable and suited to varying needs; there is a transitioning space as you enter, followed by the sleeping area with wardrobe and underbed storage. A dividing wall separates the 'bedroom' space and the 'living space' where there is a desk and sofa.

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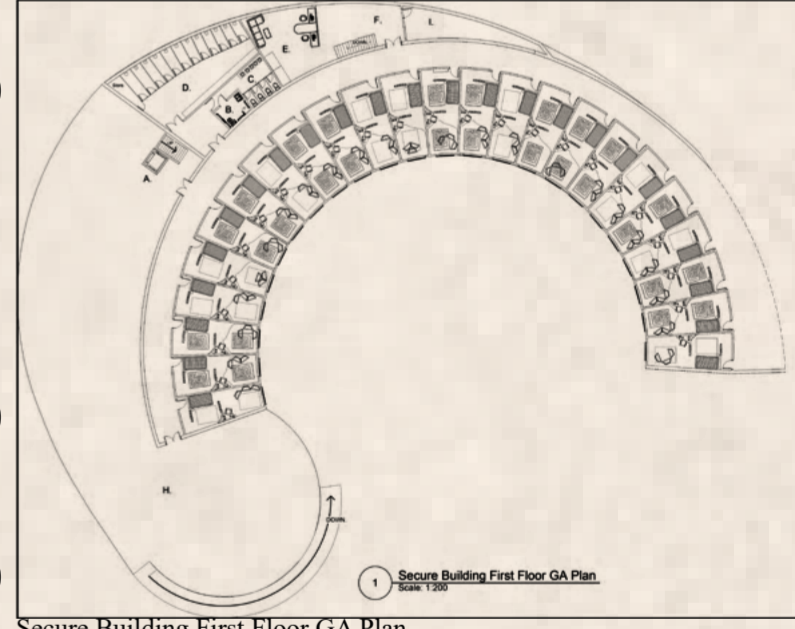
The area rugs in the bedrooms are double sided, one side has a 'labyrinth' pattern on it to regulate the Reptilian Brain when the user is overstimulated.



Secure Room Plan



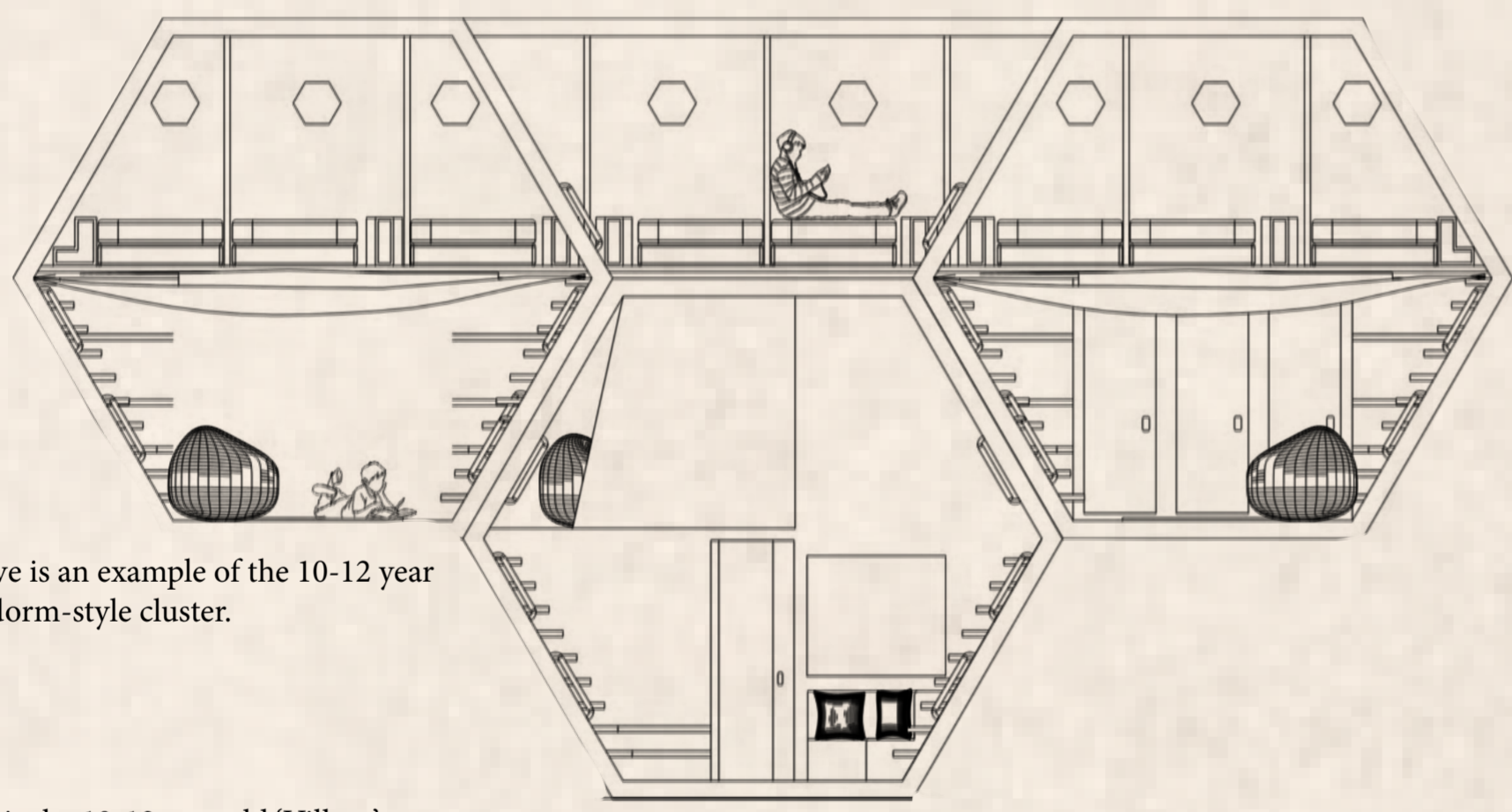
Secure Building Ground Floor GA Plan



Secure Building First Floor GA Plan

Factors to Consider:

- Cognitive Overload
- Changes in routine
- New Environments
- Social Challenges
- Visual Sensitivity
- Touch Sensitivity
- Noise Levels



Above is an example of the 10-12 year old dorm-style cluster.

Below is the 10-12 year old 'Village'.



Hexagon 13-15 Living Space and Kitchenette



Hexagon 10-12 Mezzanine

Learning at the Core

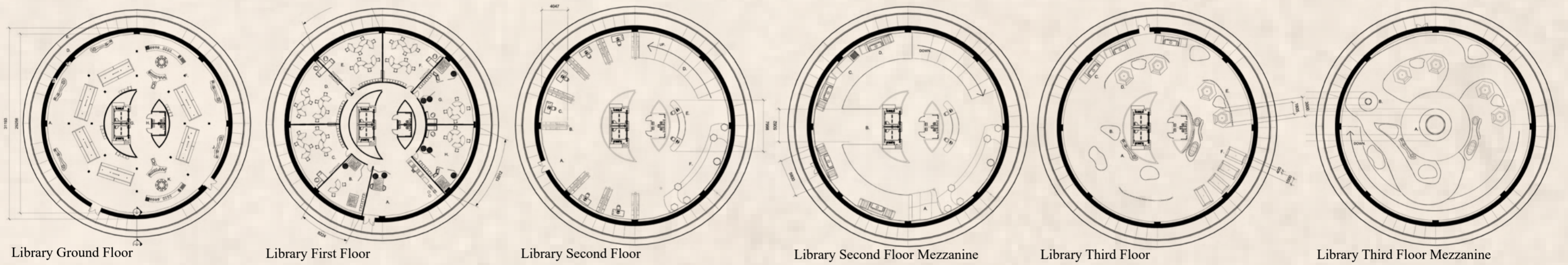
Education is at the forefront of this rehabilitation centre, the site which acts like a boarding school provides a regular school routine. There is a central Library building that hosts the dining hall on the ground floor, four eight-pupil classrooms, two four-pupil classrooms and one 2-pupil classroom on the first floor, a double height library is on the second floor with plenty of solo or group study spaces, and on the third floor there is an indoor courtyard, open to pupils, staff and visitors.

Miss Rossall highlighted the need for different types of classrooms- 'I interviewed a prison officer as part of my research for this project and when we discussed my idea for a much more relaxed environment, the officer made a very good point- the prison population is getting a lot younger and the majority of prisoners have neurodiverse needs- this comes with added complications and increased requirements'.

Miss Rossall wanted to design the site to cater for those with additional needs. There are three classrooms that are designed for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), this includes having less pupils to a teacher (2-4), having a transitional space when you enter the room, and providing a breakout space in one corner. The acoustics need to be thought through to keep noise levels low, and lighting should be adjustable, Miss Rossall has kept the colour scheme neutral but light in order to prevent over stimulation but promote learning and engage attention.



Library Visual



Library Ground Floor

Library First Floor

Library Second Floor

Library Second Floor Mezzanine

Library Third Floor

Library Third Floor Mezzanine

Here you can relax in the indoor garden or study in group or solo areas.

The rooftop garden is open in good weather to relax or study outside with a view of the whole site.

The second floor hosts a double height library, with plenty of study spaces including solo computer desks.

The first floor hosts the classrooms, there is a mixture of rooms to cater for all students- three classrooms are designed for SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities).

All students eat their meals in the dining hall, although older students have the option to cook for themselves in their accommodation.

An alternative to the central elevator shaft is the external ramp circling up the outside of the building.

Nature as Rehabilitation

Set in the heart of Dartmoor National Park, the project utilises the surrounding landscape as a component of the rehabilitation process. Access to fresh air, natural light, and views are integrated throughout to support the well being of the students and staff. The weather in Dartmoor is unpredictable and often harsh, its proximity to the sea draws in damp and cold fronts and winters are long and tough, due to this, the site has been designed to provide year-round access to outdoor or natural spaces.

‘Involving nature throughout the design was important to me, I have utilised biomorphism through the honeycomb inspired hexagon and biophilic aspects come through with the indoor courtyard and range of plant life in each building.’

As well as this, Miss Rossall turned to a case study she had grown fond of- Hope Street, a Southampton based facility for women and children in the justice system. Mike Worthington (lead architect for Hope Street), encountered an issue during the project, the residential block at the back of the site looked onto the neighbouring gardens, affecting the privacy of both the women in the building and the neighbours, his solution was a Biophilic Manifestation. Using the leaves of the River Birch Tree located in the courtyard, they created a photo-realistic biophilic pattern that covered the windows looking out behind the residential block. This allowed natural light to fall into the room but the view was restricted by a natural pattern.

‘I really liked the solution that Mike designed, I encountered a similar problem in my design- the honeycomb units were positioned so that each bedroom window faced the bedroom window of the neighbouring unit,’ Miss Rossall did not want to change the layout of the units as they were intentionally positioned to create a ‘village’ around a shared courtyard, therefore the idea of a biophilic manifestaion seemed a suitable solution.

‘Similar to Snug Architects use of the River Birch in order to create a realistic print, I wanted to use a print of the Sessile Oak, one of the most common trees found in Dartmoor.’



Indoor Garden Visual

The Future of Youth Rehabilitation

Princetown College ultimately proposes a model that positions architecture and design as an active participant in the rehabilitation process. Across each element of the site, from the communal ‘clusters’ to the integration of the landscape and surrounding nature in the library building, the design challenges the association between the justice system and punishment.

As debates around the justice system in the UK continue, the proposal of Princetown College offers a glimpse into a future of rehabilitation. Are the spaces we provide young offenders a reflection of the outcomes we seek?

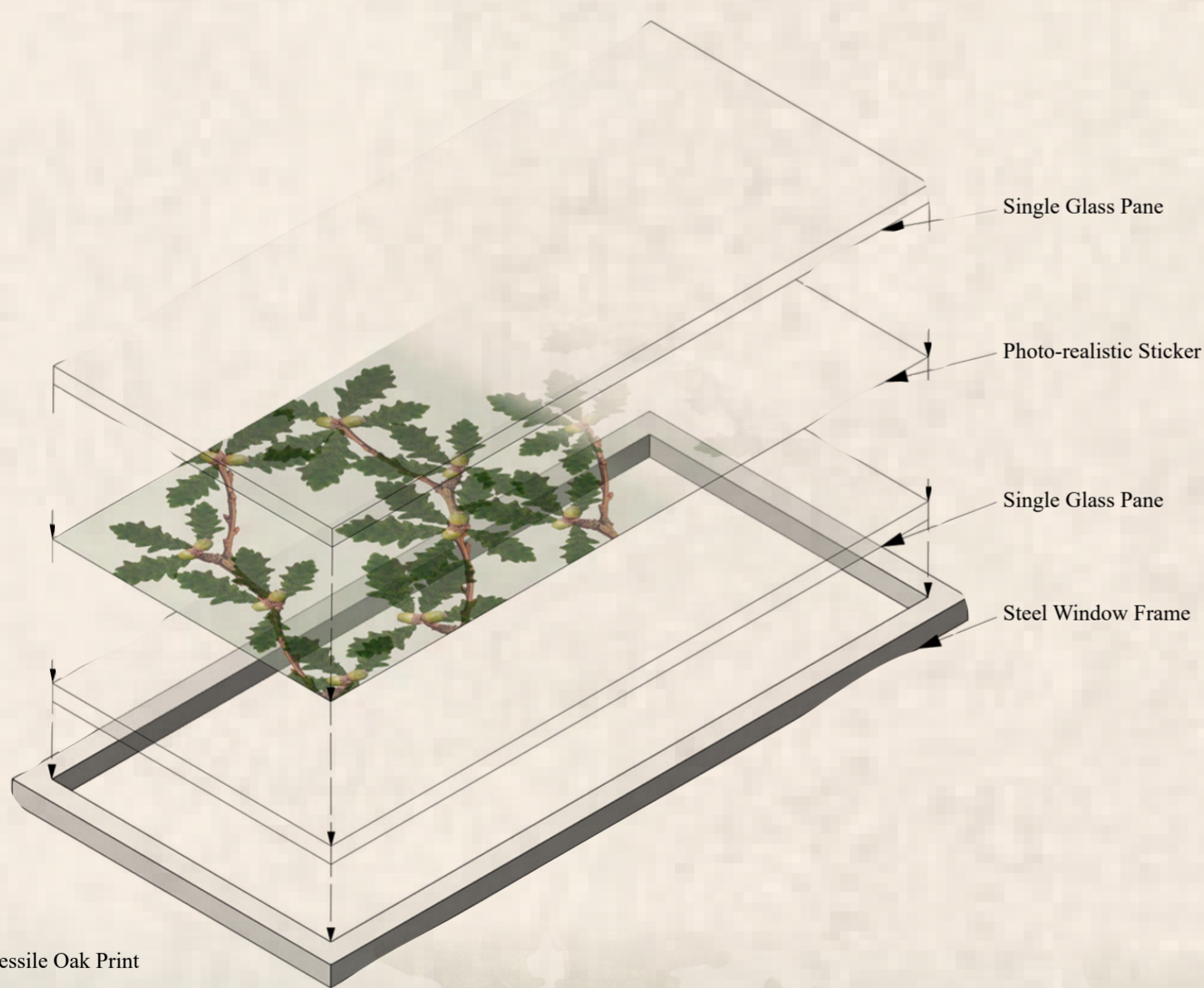
By moving from confinement to routine, idleness to education and punishment to care, we can re imagine the future of rehabilitation.



Classroom Break-out Space



Indoor Garden Study Space



Sessile Oak Print

