Wellbeing in prison design
A guide

Matter Architecture
Lily Bernheimer
Rachel O’Brien
Richard Barnes

Limitations or lack of natural light lead to sleep loss, stress and other negative effects on wellbeing.

Limited or no views create stressful conditions.

Inadequate ventilation and stability to control a sense of discomfort and stress.

Insufficient artificial light increases discomfort.

Hard materials with no acoustic absorption have negative impacts on health and wellbeing.

Excessive amount of barriers reduces a degree of free movement and increases a feeling of being confined.

Adequate cell layout enables multiple activities.

Limited or lack of natural light leads to sleep loss, stress and other negative effects on wellbeing.

Outputs

HIGHER LEVEL - Masterplan
INTERMEDIATE LEVEL - Building
DETAIL LEVEL - Specifications

Aims & Objectives:
Matter Architecture, Spaceworks Consulting, Rachel O’Brien, RPBA, Ministry of Justice
(Funded by: RIBA Research Trust Awards and Innovate)

Based on literature review, main objectives of prison research intend to reduce violence and self-harm as well as provide a maximum level of security. The aim is to use the existing research information in the Wellbeing in Prison Design project and refine it to appropriate level of relevant framework.

Buildings can have a significant impact on health and wellbeing, acting as a restriction or a tool in the process of rehabilitation in prisons. Environmental psychology evidence shows links between the environment and people’s behaviour and wellbeing determining its crucial factors.

HMP Berwyn, newest UK prison allowed the team to test and expand the ongoing research in collaboration with men in custody and institution’s staff. Electronic survey and walking audits provide informative evidence, essential in the toolkit design process.

Current prison design parameters and process are failing to provide environments that support rehabilitation. The aim of the research is to produce a report, which will become a crucial part in improving existing and new prison environments. The Wellbeing in Prison Design project intends to develop a supporting guidance for prison designers, which outlines the environmental psychology evidence in prisons, essential in improving a wellbeing of men in custody, staff and visitors. By informing the issues that are present in existing prison designs, alternative however informative solutions are suggested in order to support rehabilitation and resettlement to reduce re-offending.
Wellbeing in prison design

New Design Guidance
A team led by architecture practice Matter has developed guidance to improve the design of prisons. Setting out a series of practical design principles, Wellbeing in Prison Design argues that the way in which prisons have been commissioned and built in the past has proved to be a barrier to rehabilitation and the welfare of the workforce.

Research and consultation
Funded by the RIBA and Innovate UK, the team has engaged with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Prison Estate Transformation Programme to provide independent guidance on design-related benefits within the prison environment and a method for monitoring the success of improvements over time.

The guidance uses evidence from the field of environmental psychology to specify areas of design that will support better health and wellbeing of people residing in, working in and visiting prisons. Focusing on planning processes, construction methods, layout, materials, landscape, atmosphere and accessibility, the guidance is informed by direct consultation with prisoners and staff at the UK’s newest and largest prison, HMP Berwyn.

An electronic survey, to be delivered to the whole prison population at HMP Berwyn will provide a unique dataset and a means to monitor the effect of design improvements over time and across different establishments.

Recommendations
The guidance covers issues like lighting, acoustics and how design can support employment, positive choices and relationships. It aims to ensure that the design of any new prisons will help with desistance, rehabilitation and resettlement, arguing this will ultimately support its aim of reducing reoffending.

The report also makes recommendations for embedding design values in the government’s commissioning and procurement process. This includes the effective engagement with local stakeholders in the design process, including governors, prison officers and prisoners; and the introduction of a Design Review for prisons. Design review is an independent process with a proven track record of increasing value in the commissioning of infrastructure and building projects and is described further in the report.

Future development
The Wellbeing in Prison Design Guide will continue to be refined and expanded through its intended use in the design of new prisons and its potential use in existing establishments. This guide focuses on prison architecture, but sits within a broader set of initiatives to promote prison reform through design, including: RSA Transitions: Building a Rehabilitation Culture, which sets out a social enterprise model for the re-use of MoJ assets to deliver rehabilitation outcomes (RSA 2014).

The New Futures Network, a proposal for a new body to support practical innovation and prison reform.

How to use the report
The full report is organised as a set of semi-independent documents, or chapters. We anticipate there will be a wide range of interested audiences and so we have chosen to publish the full range of work undertaken in developing this first design guidance. The guide is currently neither complete nor comprehensive, but is set out as a demonstrator of how evidence can be applied through design to contribute to better outcomes. A chain of evidence is created through the set of chapters so that the basis for design improvements is made explicit and so that the guidance can be updated over time. New evidence from the electronic prison surveys currently underway will also be incorporated over time as well as acting as a monitoring method for implemented design measures. The design guidance itself is contained in chapter 4 so that it may be used independently as a reference document, via the hyperlinks on the contents page.

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Executive Summary

Wellbeing in prison design

Estimated cost per annum of re-offending is £9.5 - £13 Billion
source: ONS

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Matter Architecture

Matter Architecture is a new practice, formed in 2016 by Roland Karthaus (formerly principal of Karthaus Design) and Jonathan McDowell (partner McDowell and Benedetti 1996-2016).

Our buildings aim to be uplifting, responsive to their context and enduring for people to use and enjoy for the long term. We avoid narrowly specialising so that our mix of work makes for a rich and creative environment in which every project is unique and benefits from a breadth of knowledge and research.

An RIBA Chartered Practice, Matter works on a wide range of projects across all building types and scales, for public, private and trustees clients. These include community and education projects, housing, commercial, infrastructure and bridges, public realm, urban design and masterplans.

The team

The Wellbeing in Prison Design project has been developed collaboratively by a multi-disciplinary team, led by Matter including: Spaceworks Consulting, an environmental psychology practice working in the built environment; Rachel O’Brien consultant specialising in prisons policy and engaging prison-users and staff; and RP Barnes Associates (RPBA), a justice consultancy with expertise in service-providers operating inside and outside prisons. The composition of this team and the methods employed are intended to incorporate wider experience and knowledge into the process of designing prison buildings, whilst focusing on achieving changes through physical design measures.

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Matter Architecture and the authors assert all rights, including intellectual and copyright to the contents of the work. The work is offered freely to prison commissioners, designers and operators for use in their normal design, retrofitting and adaptation projects, providing that these rights are acknowledged and not adversely affected and that feedback is provided to the team to help improve the design guide.

Additional support to prison design and construction professionals is available via consultancy. Please contact Roland at Matter for details.
Roland Karthaus, Director, Matter Architecture
Roland Karthaus co-founded Matter Architecture with Jonathan McDowell in 2016. He has been a registered Architect since 2002, a Member of the Royal Institute of British Architects, an RIBA Client Adviser and a member of the RIBA Planning Group. He is a Fellow of the RSA and a Design Council Built Environment Expert. Matter’s Lucy Block and Anthony Hu worked together with Roland and the University of East London’s Agata Korsak to conduct the work.

Lily Bernheimer, Director, Space Works Consulting

Rachel O’Brien, Prison reform consultant
Rachel O’Brien has led the RSA’s work on prisons for the last 10 years. She co-authored with Karthaus RSA Transitions: Building a Rehabilitation Culture (RSA 2014) and, with Jack Robson, A Matter of Conviction (RSA 2016). Rachel recently completed work on a proposal for a new body to support prisons and their partners in reform (The New Futures Network, RSA 2017).

Richard Barnes, Director, RP Barnes Associates
Richard Barnes is a justice consultant and social entrepreneur. He is working to create new employment and social inclusion opportunities for prisoners and people with convictions in the community. His current interests range from prison design conducive rehabilitation environments, creating a whole system rehabilitation culture and effective partnership working.

Acknowledgements
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We would especially like to thank all those people at HMP Berwyn - the management, frontline staff and men in custody - for enabling and taking part in the fieldwork.
The findings and views in this report are solely those of the research team and not of the organisations that have provided data to the researchers.

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