

A great tradition of care

More than a century since Le Platon nursing home was established, it is undergoing a massive transformation and will be St Peter Port's first purpose-built home caring for dementia patients. **Martyn Tolcher** reports

ESTABLISHED 105 years ago, Le Platon Home in St Peter Port is to be transformed into a residential home and dementia care centre fully equipped to meet the needs of Guernsey's ageing population. Two new wings will be built to join onto the existing main building at Clifton and there will be a special emphasis within the rejuvenated home on providing expert support for people with dementia. The £6m. plus redevelopment, which will take two years to complete, will result in Le Platon being able to provide permanent living accommodation for up to 49 residents instead of the present 25. The first phase of the redevelopment is already under way with the demolition of the old office block which is where the new west wing of Le Platon Home will take shape later this year. This will be followed in 2020 with the construction of a new north wing together with a total redesign of the home's garden and outdoor areas overlooking Town and the smaller islands. The charitable home's board of trustees has taken on local firm RG Falla to do the construction work, with Guernsey architects DRP responsible for the project design. 'I think the transformation is just going to be colossal,' said Jurat Mike Tanguy, the chairman of Le Platon Home's board of trustees. 'What we've got here is going to be a 21st century building for the care of our residents and patients. 'The beauty of the site will be enhanced considerably with the development. It's going to enhance the whole of the building and improve the views.'

The original home at Le Platon was established in 1914 through the vision and generosity of its founder, Miss Edith Renouf MBE, who made it initially a place of refuge for the incurably ill.

In post-war times Le Platon has become firmly established as a residential and care home for elderly Guernsey people of all backgrounds. But about seven years ago the trustees began to recognise that the home would have to be radically reinvented to meet the future needs of its clients. 'I said to the board we need to start thinking seriously about how we look to the future because we've inherited a priceless asset, but like all of us it's getting older,' Jurat Tanguy explained. 'The facilities were getting out of date and if we continued on the same path we would be not up to the latest standards for medical health. 'We discussed it for a long time and eventually we decided to go for it. We wanted to create something for the 21st century, but it also meant that to make it viable and practical it needed to increase its size.' The trustees have had to overcome a number of planning hurdles to get

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Jurat Mike Tanguy, chairman of Le Platon's board of trustees

to the building stage, but the major challenge has been securing enough finance to get the project off the ground. 'We have approached the States' Policy & Resources Committee with a proposal to borrow from Guernsey's public bond, but as a non-States body we did not meet the necessary criteria at this time. 'We lost probably three years and that delay has added a substantial sum to our building costs, which is really frustrating. 'We're not here to make money. No director receives funds. The objective of the house is to plough any reserves that we have back into the house.'

With work now finally under way, those behind the project are assuring people who the inevitable disruption that comes with major building works will be kept to a minimum. Acting on advice, they decided against using a steel framework for the construction of the two new blocks because that would have resulted in the need to bring a large crane or cranes into a very tight area. 'We wanted to avoid all that. It's not an easy site, but we are going for a conventional type block-work building and the builders are confident. 'The good thing about it is that while there's going to be some disruption, the existing wing here will work independently for the time being. 'The greater difficulty will be on the last phase in 2020, creating the new courtyard and residential area.' As the project progresses one of the main considerations will be to ensure that the floor levels of the new blocks are brought into line with those of the original Victorian building.

This will make it much easier for nursing staff, residents, patients and their visitors to negotiate the interconnected complex of buildings.

The development will also result in a new, more easily accessible chapel being built inside to replace the present one. The original home, which was run by a Spanish Catholic nursing order, the Congregation of the Sisters Hospitaller of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, was open to people of all denominations. Today Le Platon continues to pride itself on catering for people of all faiths and none, described by Jurat Tanguy as a wonderful ecumenical achievement. He and his fellow trustees are confident that as people get to know more about their ambitious plans for Le Platon the funding will continue to come in. 'I've said to our board a number of times that we will only see real enthusiasm when the digger goes in, but already within the parish we've had some very kind donations and offers of private loans.' The trustees' chair praised the work of a small group, the Friends of Le Platon, which was set up three years ago to support the home and has provided it with a new minibus. He also lauded the home's staff for their commitment and willingness to put up with all the disruption over the next two years. 'We're also blessed with a long-serving team who are very loyal and very caring, which is the essence of what the house is about. 'We still think as a charitable organisation that we do give something special.'

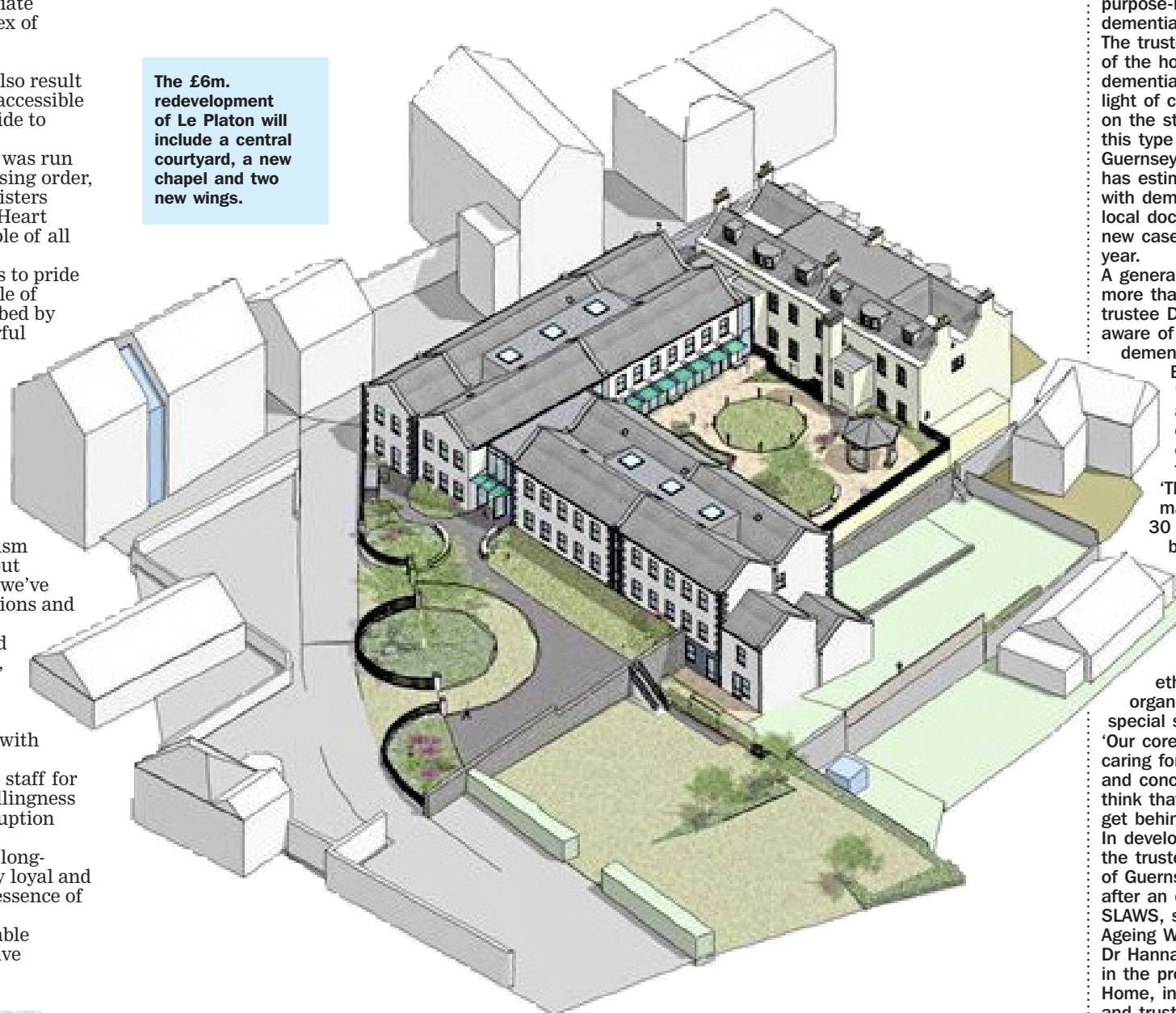


Above: Mike Tanguy, chairman of Le Platon's board of trustees, with Dr Robbie Hanna, vice chairman. (Picture by Adrian Miller, 23869237)

Left: The elegant Victorian main building will remain.



The £6m. redevelopment of Le Platon will include a central courtyard, a new chapel and two new wings.



'Everything from the size of the rooms, the equipment, the nature of the care we'll be providing, will be as good as it can be, based on the best evidence for patients with dementia'

Le Platon Home trustee Dr Robbie Hanna



Left and below: Work is under way at the Clifton site with the demolition of an old office building, clearing the way for the construction of the first of two new wings.



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On its completion in 2020 the extended Le Platon Home will become St Peter Port's first purpose-built residence for people with dementia. The trustees' decision to refocus much of the home's work on caring for dementia patients was taken in the light of current population trends and on the steadily increasing demand for this type of facility. Guernsey's Public Health Department has estimated the number of people with dementia at around 1,200, with local doctors referring more than 100 new cases to secondary care every year. A general practitioner on the island for more than 25 years, Le Platon Home trustee Dr Robbie Hanna is acutely aware of the pressing need for more dementia care provision within the Bailiwick. 'I volunteered to become a trustee because when it comes to the care of the elderly, I believe we are at a tipping point,' he said. 'There will be three times as many people over 85 in the next 30 years – the demographic time bomb is here and now, so we have to plan for it, but who is going to make these provisions? 'Well, we have had a tradition of care for over 100 years. We've got a great ethos of care, we're a voluntary organisation and that gives us a special strength. 'Our core values are still the same – caring for people, trying to show love and concern and compassion – and I think that the people of Guernsey will get behind us. 'In developing their plans for the home the trustees have followed the States of Guernsey's official policy for looking after an older population – known as SLAWS, short for Supported Living and Ageing Well. Dr Hanna said that everyone involved in the project to redesign Le Platon Home, including the architects, staff and trustees, had worked together to make it as 'dementia friendly'

as possible. He predicted that the new-look home would succeed as a result of its professional and highly committed nursing staff and because of the unique environment that it will provide for dementia patients. 'Everything from the size of the rooms, the equipment, the nature of the care we'll be providing, will be as good as it can be, based on the best evidence for patients with dementia.' The new facilities at Le Platon Home will also help to ease the burden for families and carers of dementia patients. 'Some families could do with a week or two of respite and this new provision will allow more respite work to perhaps ease the pressure a little bit,' said Dr Hanna. 'The great strength is that the external and internal environment has been very carefully designed. One of the things people with dementia really love is music, being outdoors and being with nature. 'The new facilities will enable residents and friends to be outdoors in summer and not feel trapped in a room. It will be a wonderful space for the patients to go into to meet their loved ones and friends. 'It's also very important for the elderly and people with dementia to be part of the community and not shut away somewhere. 'These are people who have contributed to the community to make Guernsey what it is, so let's look after them.'

Dr Robbie Hanna (on the left) and Jurat Mike Tanguy on site at Le Platon. (23869232)

