

GREEN GODDESS 'PERHAPS YOUR BANK IS DOING SIMILAR STUFF. APART FROM THE PENGUINS BIT'

LOUISA PEARSON

IT'S a bank holiday weekend (except in Scotland). The bit in brackets appears on my calendar but no-one seems to be paying a blind bit of attention to it. Any excuse for a Monday off, particularly if there's a scrap of sunshine. Those of you who work in 'essential services' like nursing, policing or journalism will be well used to looking longingly at bank holidays on the calendar. Did you like the way I slipped in journalism, the forgotten essential service? Ah yes, you'll find us working on bank holidays without even the hope of a fat public sector pension at the end of it. Moving on, before the rotten cabbages start flying, we are going to take a look at the banks rather than the holidays.

Did you pick your bank for its green credentials? I didn't. I picked one with a reputation for good service, no monthly charges (though they've since got around this by introducing 'annual overdraft arrangement fees') and which paid out a bit of interest on savings. I also chose First Direct because it's an online bank. This was intended as a protest against high street banks that open their doors after I get to work, close at lunchtime and shut at 4.45pm, just in case anyone has any notion of popping in after work. So the online bank is saving money and resources by not having branches, but are its call centres well-insulated and fitted with energy-saving bulbs? Are they investing my vast wealth in eco-friendly ventures?

I log on to First Direct, wince at the dire state of my current account, then click on the About Us section - which says the bank is aiming to reduce its energy use by 20 per cent. Clicking further, I find myself in an 'interactive zone' where I learn that several lucky employees got to dress up as penguins and polar bears to highlight World Environment Day.

More encouraging, they appear to recycle, support environmental charities, have a system to switch off unused computers at night (I call this the 'off' switch) and have installed energy-efficient air-conditioning. Perhaps your bank is doing similar stuff. Except for the penguins bit. I have some ethical concerns about that.

The Co-operative Bank was well ahead of the game, launching its ethical policy in 1992, and it produces an annual sustainability report. Stats from the most recent one show a 35 per cent reduction in greenhouse emissions since 2006, while four per cent of pre-tax profit is invested in communities. Triodos Bank also has a strong ethical policy, and finances organisations from organic food and farming businesses to recycling companies and nature conservation projects. Triodos doesn't offer current accounts but you can save or invest.

Other banks boast carbon-neutral status for parts of their operations, such as HSBC and Santander, meaning they buy carbon credits to offset their footprint. Ideally this will be combined with active environmentally friendly actions - HSBC reduced its total waste by 23 per cent in 2009 as compared to the year before, and has been busy putting solar panels on the roofs of some of its buildings. That's nice, I hear you thinking, but what rate can it give me on an ISA?

So if you want a green bank, first look for its environmental policy - if it doesn't have one, give them a piece of your mind and take your money elsewhere. ■

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The recovery position

Since pleasant surroundings aid healing, a Glasgow health board aims to help people get better by design

WORDS RUTH WALKER

WHEN you describe something as 'clinical', it tends to mean sterile and barren; clean, yes, but lacking in character and somehow not entirely pleasant. It's a word that springs to mind in hospitals and health centres; places where, frankly, interior design and artwork go to die.

But it doesn't have to be that way. In *Secret Life of Buildings*, a recent three-part series on Channel 4, architecture critic Tom Dyckhoff claimed the design of the spaces we live and work in can shape our identity, relationships, self-esteem, chances at school - even our weight and immune systems.

The Maggie's Centres, in particular, have proved that good design can actually have a beneficial effect on people's health and general well-being. Inspirational architecture is integral to the cancer care charity - employing high-profile designers such as Frank Gehry and Zaha Hadid to create their buildings - and co-founder Charles Jencks believes it can have a dramatically positive effect on both body and soul.

It's an ethos that is now being adopted officially by the National Health Service too, where the emphasis has moved from purely healing the physical to benefiting the spiritual and emotional as well. In practice, this means introducing light and space, gardens and artworks where once there might have been greying Venetian blinds and

- shudder - that pale, Germolene-pink on the walls. A pilot project at Glasgow's Stobhill hospital is currently underway, enabling patients in a rehab unit to choose the artworks for their rooms. A rooftop garden planned for the children's hospital at the new acute unit in the south of the city will also be used as a performance space, where artists and musicians will be invited to work with the young people.

NHS Glasgow and Clyde's Design Action Plan - for hospital and health centre refurbishments and new-builds - is based on irrefutable evidence that design has a significant impact on health. Anna Baxendale, head of health improvement and inequalities, says, "It obviously has a therapeutic impact, with feelings of calm, well-being, reduced levels of depression, reduced levels of medication. But there's also quite a lot of evidence in terms of rates of healing."

She cites a test carried out some years ago, which showed that surgical patients who had a view from a window recovered faster - and so had a shorter hospital stay - than those who did not. "We shouldn't underestimate what we can achieve through good design," she says. "The things we know about are things like natural light, space and also the ability to have some sort of control over an individual's own environment. It's all about personalisation."

Even the paint colour used on the

HEALTHY BITE 'HAND-WRITTEN ONES ARE THE WORST. THEY'RE THE COMPLAINERS'

RUTH WALKER

YOU'VE got mail. Such a magical message, no? Full of mystery and promise and possibilities. For a tiny moment in time, it could be anything: an unexpected windfall; a love letter; a card from a friend saying they were just thinking of you.

Even better when it's real mail, not that boring e-stuff, which is as likely to promise 'free' laser eye surgery and 'top-quality meds' and 'unmissable offers from Steve at Totally Money' as it is a party invitation.

Even now, when I hear the rattling of the letterbox, I get a momentary shiver of excitement as I anticipate what delights the day's postbag might contain. "Why does all the mail come to you?" demanded the Wild One years ago, all petted lip and frown, in an almighty huff because, for some inexplicable reason, it was I who received all the bills and tax demands and insurance reminders. Jeez! Go figure!

At work, the mail isn't what it could be either, to be honest. The hand-written ones are the worst. They're the complainers. Four sheets of A4 paper etched with all my wrongdoings or misspellings or sins too numerous to mention (you know who you are, and that injunction is still legally binding).

So when a card appeared while I was out, informing me an item with my name on it was currently residing at the depot awaiting pick-up, my interest was piqued. Never mind that 'insufficient payment' had been provided, and I was therefore due to pay the princely sum of £1.12 before I could take possession of said mystery item. Call it eternal optimism. Call it unflinching naivety. Either way, it was like a burning flame to my gullible, fragile moth.

For a week, I put it off. For one thing, the depot was open only between 6.30am and 9.30am, which don't tend to be the hours at which I'm at my most alert. Basically, I kept forgetting.

Then I remembered I was awaiting payment for some work I'd done a couple of months before. That would, indeed, arrive in cheque form. By post. In fact, the person concerned is so chaotic and hare-brained, they might also be inclined to put the wrong payment on the envelope. The more I thought about it, the more it made sense. I had £180 sitting in a post office in Stockbridge just waiting for me. All I needed to do was get up early enough to get it.

The first morning, I slept in. The next, I had a breakfast meeting at work. The one after that, I was out the door like a greyhound with the scent of a rabbit in its nostrils. Post Office card? Check.

Proof of identity? Check.
Purse? Check. Cheque?
Not yet, but soon.

The people in front of me were picking up all manner of goodies: big, interesting-looking boxes and over-stuffed Jiffy bags. My heart was pounding with feverish anticipation.

As I reached the front of the queue, the man at the counter fetched my mail. Small, white envelope. Hand-written. Dumfries postmark. I recognised it immediately.

While on holiday with a friend earlier this year, she had mistakenly packed my bikini strap in her bag. Now I have it back. I'm glad, of course, but I'd rather have got a cheque. ■

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WELL BUILT
Healthy design was taken into consideration for Glasgow's Barrhead Health Centre (main) and Beatson cancer unit (left and above)



walls is taken into consideration, says Baxendale. "We also try to be less austere than some older hospitals."

And while you might imagine this great design will have a knock-on effect in terms of cost, that's not always the case. Keith Stewart, of Hypostyle Architects, which helped plan the Beatson cancer centre and the new maternity unit at the Southern General, says, "If you get involved from an early stage, you can do things that don't actually have any real cost - it just takes a bit of care and attention. The colour of the interior design, for instance. And lighting. If you can get as much natural lighting as possible, it makes a big difference."

On the receiving end are people like Anne Marie Kennedy, a patients' representative who helped plan the futuristic new Barrhead health centre. From early meetings to drawing up specifications, she was involved every step of the way, and is convinced it made a difference. The new centre is filled with natural light, with views of the Ferenzeze hills. She says, "It has an atrium - a big, open space as you go in - with lots of light. It's so bright and airy. I think when it's dull and dingy it's depressing and it doesn't help our well-being."

But wouldn't the cash be better spent on something more tangible? "I think it's a good investment to put money into making places look better for health," says Kennedy. "People respond better." ■



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YOUTHFUL LOOKS I will be celebrating my 50th birthday soon and I'm becoming self-conscious about the ageing process. How can I keep a fresh and younger look?
Fiona, Edinburgh

Ageing is a complex process driven by a number of factors including our genes, sun exposure, smoking and the stresses and strains of life. The facial skin may feel dry, look dull with uneven pigmentation. This may be combined with deepening lines and folds. Reduced skin elasticity leads to sagginess and loss of firmness. Changes in the structures under the skin, such as the fatty tissue and the muscles of facial expression, can result in unwanted bulges such as eye bags, loss of fullness of the cheeks and jowling.

Facial rejuvenation could be achieved in a variety



of ways ranging from simple procedures to complex surgical procedures requiring hospital stay. There is nothing like a face to face consultation with an expert who is familiar with the various options, which include injectables (fillers and Botox) lasers, chemical peels, volume restorations by fat/stem cell grafting as well as surgical procedures such as face, neck, eye and brow lifts.

Rejuvenation can be achieved entirely by non-surgical means. However, certain ageing features such as advanced hooding and jowling can only be effectively solved by surgery.

Mr Quaba is a Consultant Plastic Surgeon at Spire Murrayfield Hospital.

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION FOR OUR MEDICAL EXPERTS?

If so, e-mail murrayfieldhospital@spirehealthcare.com. We will endeavour to deal with all enquiries as quickly as possible, but regret that we cannot enter into personal correspondence.

Spire Murrayfield Hospital is holding a Health Day on 3 September. The event is free and open to all. A range of specialist consultants will be on-hand to update you on all the latest procedures and techniques. If you are interested in infertility treatments, cosmetic surgery, weight loss surgery, varicose veins treatment or knee pain, contact us to find out how to register for this special event. Call 0131-316 2507, e-mail cservice-ed@spirehealthcare.com or visit www.spirehealthcare.com/Edinburgh

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