

Aroga Kuti: What the building is and what it provides

It is anticipated that the resident or residents may from time to time wish to meet with the wider community in the nursing kuti, and so on entering the main door the resident or visitor will come into a light and high oak-framed room, facing a Buddha rupa. Behind this will be a Sun Room or sitting space for resident sangha and their guests.

There are effectively two rooms for the main resident, who may be disabled or dying; one is a sizable bedroom with provision for a ceiling mounted hoist, an adjustable hospital style bed and a good wheelchair turning circle. The kuti will also have a call-system linked to the main building. The main bedroom faces south to maximize the natural light. An adjoining room, marked as the Treatment Room, will also be suitable for use as an office or as an extra bedroom, should circumstances necessitate.

On the other side of the building is a room for a live-in carer, with its own ensuite facilities. There is a utility room that will enable the hygienic washing of bedding, and a simple kitchenette. And, in common with monasteries around the world, a sauna.

Various combinations of heating and energy-harvesting, such as ground source heat-pumps, photovoltaic and heated water solar panels, were extensively explored. In the end, because of obstruction by trees it was decided to not have roof panels but to heat using air-source heat-pump methods. It was also agreed to build to Passive House (Passivhaus) standards and principles, which combine high-level comfort with very low energy consumption. This will keep the running costs to a minimum.

The group taking the Amaravati Long Term Plan forward will be revisiting the issue of having an energy plan for the whole monastery as this does not need to wait until all the new buildings are designed.

Coming back to the nursing kuti design, the diagram shows the thickness of the walls and the exceptionally high level of insulation used throughout, which reflects an emphasis on incorporating the energy efficiency into the fabric of the building to the degree that this will be cost efficient over the lifetime of the building. Taking this theme one step further means the windows, which can be opened when required, will incorporate well insulated frames and be triple-glazed to minimize heat loss on this hill-top windy site in winter. The nursing kuti will be both draught-proofed and well ventilated; by utilising all of the above design standards the amount of heating power required will be very low e.g. a 20 square metre room built to Passive House standards can be heated using 10 tea lights or the body heat of four people even in the middle of winter. Unlike the community's current wooden buildings, which cool quickly when the heating is off, by using comfort ventilation and a highly efficient heat recovery system the nursing kuti should have a relatively stable temperature of between 20-25°C.

The bedrooms and other spaces are off to each side, giving those areas a degree of privacy.

The nursing kuti will stand in its own landscaped garden, retaining as far as possible existing trees, shrubs and hedging on its boundaries. The garden has been designed as a place suitable for quiet reflection and meditation which insects, small mammals and birds will be encouraged to inhabit. There will be level access to the entrance and a new continuous path surrounding the building will provide access to all parts of the garden. This path will be built to a width which will enable two people to walk side by side and so a carer can provide the necessary support to somebody who needs to use a walking frame or wheelchair. The design includes seating areas, and a housing with a charging point for a mobility scooter.

A minimum number of LED lights will be installed in the garden to provide the necessary illumination for the garden to be used safely at dusk, at night or during the shorter winter days. Rainwater will be harvested for use in the newly planted garden area.

Access to the kuti will be via a new section of road, built to the standard that all of the internal roadways at Amaravati will eventually be built to and it will be linked by telephone and IT services to the rest of the monastery and beyond.

Final fitting out of the kuti will take place during the summer of 2016 and it is hoped it will be available and ready for occupation by Luang Por Sumedho during his planned visit in the spring and summer of 2017.