Democratic therapeutic community prisons such as HMP Grendon offer a radical alternative to mainstream imprisonment. Grendon was opened in 1962 and was created as “a penal institution of a special kind” in which men could explore their backgrounds and histories, whilst taking responsibility for their own lives and those of fellow residents. The prison provides a service working with some of the most "difficult, damaged and dangerous" people in the prison system, and has offered “an exceptionally safe and humane prison, which also happens to be highly effective in the rehabilitation of serious offenders”.

This presentation will offer a description of the work of HMP Grendon and a summary of the empirical evidence regarding its effectiveness. It will also discuss some of the challenges of conserving therapeutic work in the contemporary penal system as well as the opportunities to promote alternative approaches to the practices of imprisonment.