

**MANCHESTER SCHOOL
OF ARCHITECTURE**



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**MSA
LIVE 21**

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“We shall leave this city not less, but greater, better and more beautiful than it was left to us.”
- Tom Bloxham

“Innovation is not an aim for our business but a by-product of never accepting the stock answer. We see change as opportunity, not a threat and start with the belief that there is a better way. It is this belief that makes us open to new ideas, intent on learning and enthusiastic collaborators” – Urban Splash

Founded in 1993, Urban Splash is one of the leading developers in the country, focusing on the regeneration of decaying urban structures. The practice places an emphasis on good design and the importance of good place-making having completed prominent projects in Manchester such as the regeneration of New Islington and Irwell Riverside.

Whilst the practice’s primary principle is to rescue the great industrial landmarks of the past, Urban Splash is also a leading figure in new pioneering housing concepts. In 2016, Urban Splash, in collaboration with architecture firm ShedKM, launched their first modular houses which re-imagined the concept of homes and neighbourhoods.

“We believe in the power of design. Through great design we can make sustainability second nature, build lasting communities, and most importantly create homes that people will love for generations” – Urban Splash

Agenda

The Blueline

The Manchester Blueline seeks to act as a central spine that connects, supports and enhances the 3 districts of Salford, Trafford and Manchester City Centre through a shared relationship with the River Irwell. Currently the three neighbouring areas are strongly divided by the river which has become an obstacle for residents and tourists. The Blueline has been designed with the aim to stitch these three disconnected districts back together, resulting in an improved riverside experience for all.

The group have taken a contextualised approach through studying the several distinct areas that border the river and defining their social and programmatic needs in order to serve and enhance the lives of the community. As it stands these contrasting zones are extremely disconnected and do not provide a continuous route along the river. This is something we aim to tackle with the introduction of the Blueline, providing a safe and enjoyable outdoor experience in a time when outdoor activity is particularly relevant and desired within the city. The Blueline also promotes green travel, connecting key landmarks across the city and neighbouring districts, and also aims to address the safety issues at the riverside associated with anti-social behaviour through design strategies which provide passive surveillance.

We have explored several key social design drivers including the importance of pedestrianised space, cycle paths, accessibility, landscaping and most importantly providing flexible yet purposeful public space. Through this exploration our proposal will serve to facilitate meaningful and productive interactions within the community.



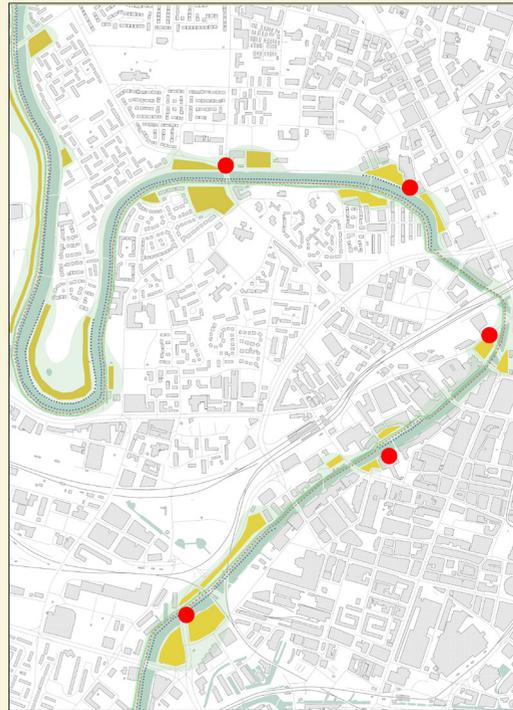
Masterplan Strategies

The aim is to split into 3 different groups and critically explore and analyse different precedents concerning the proposed Blue Line's Signage, Landscaping Strategy and added Structures

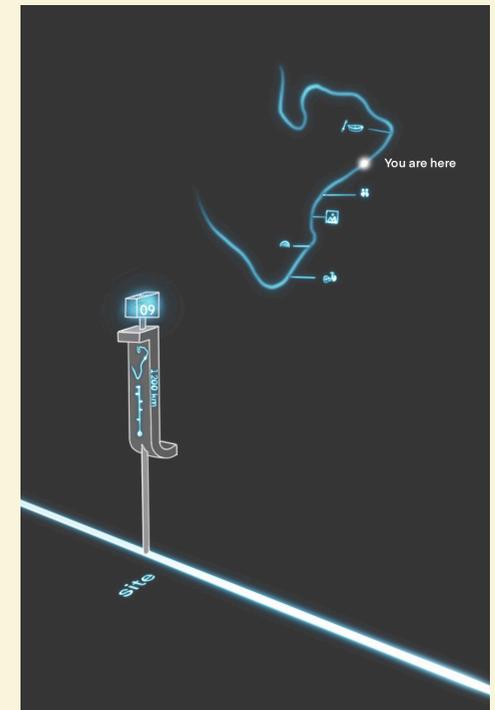
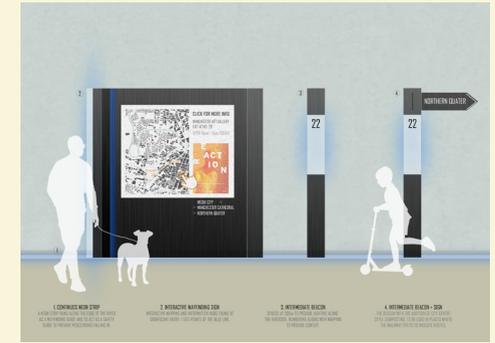
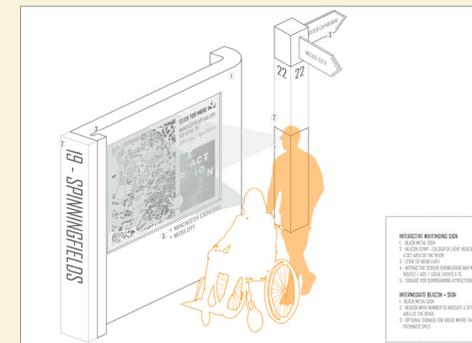
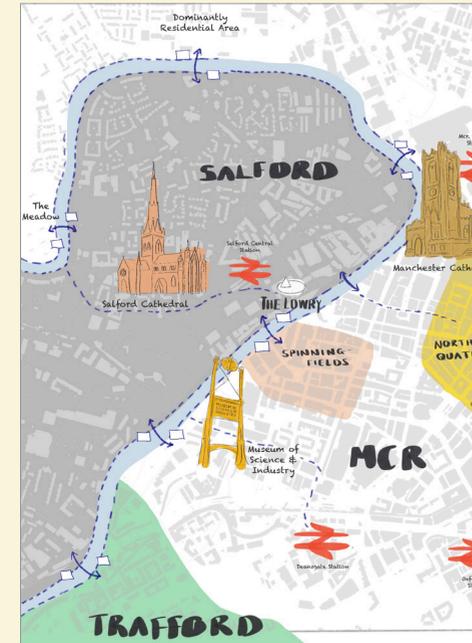
Signage - The group's objective is to examine the concepts of signage, way finding and creating connections, whilst finding an answer on how signage and the use of lighting can promote a safety environment to the users. An opportunity to adapt to the technology of today is also present with the concepts of interactive posters and signs that can provide a range of information.

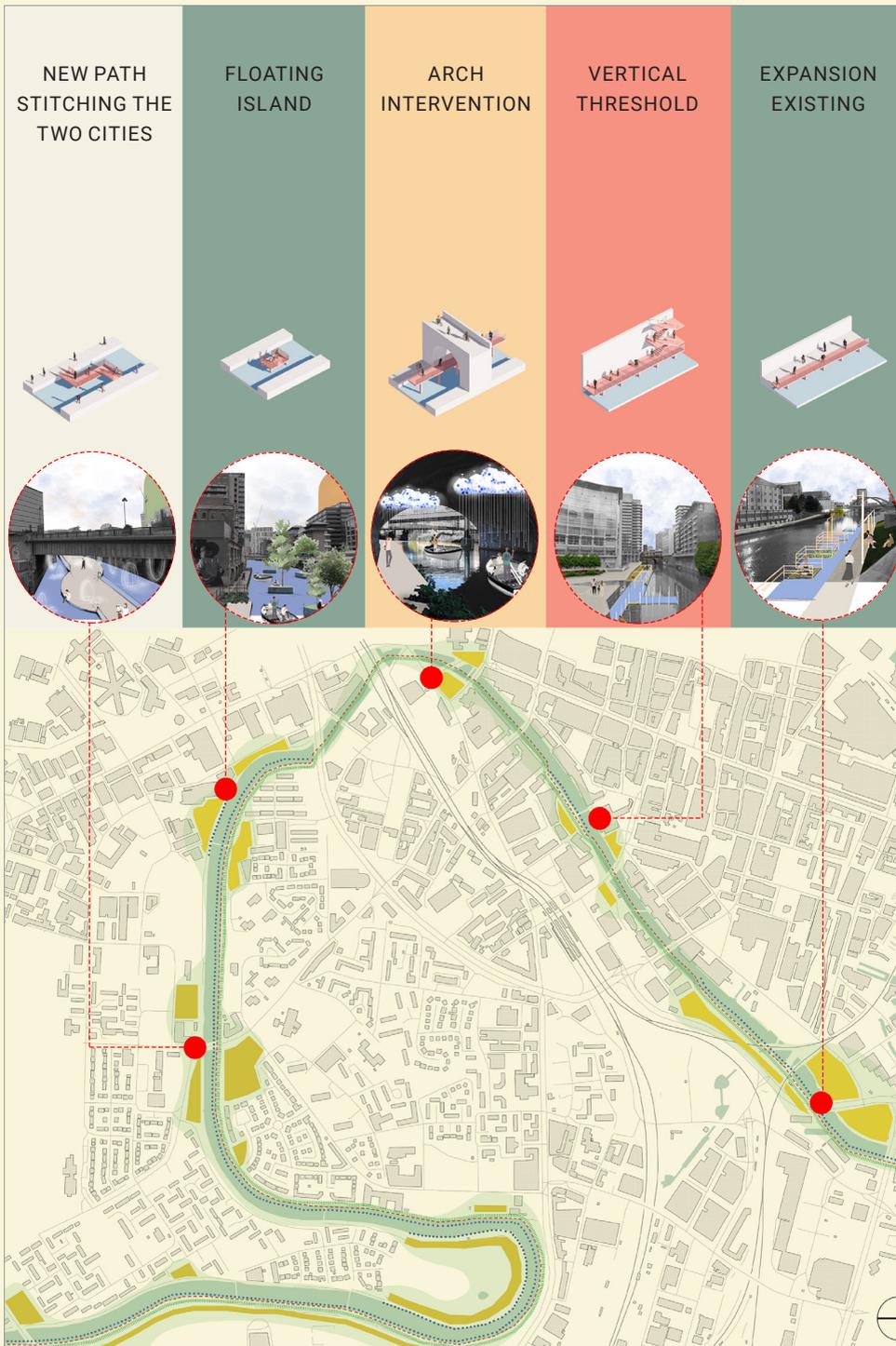
Landscape - The group's objective is to explore the four aspects of designing landscape along the River Irwell, from the use of different surface materiality, different threshold treatments for specific functions, arrangements of varying pedestrian levels, and finally an incorporation of integrated urban furnitures. Through these considerations of key design aspects, the framework for landscaping strategy can be refined, developed, and formalised.

Structure - The group's objective is to study how different structures may be added to the river, from creating new paths, expanding existing pathways, creating access, and potential floating islands. Exploring a range of possible art installations along the river were also incorporated to attract activity and encourage user interactions. The use of modular methods of construction were also explored as a way to provide flexibility and adapt to the changes of the river.



Signage Strategy





Structure & Art Strategy

We developed 5 main categories that were then taken forward and illustrated as design implementations on key areas of the masterplan.

Modern Methods of Construction

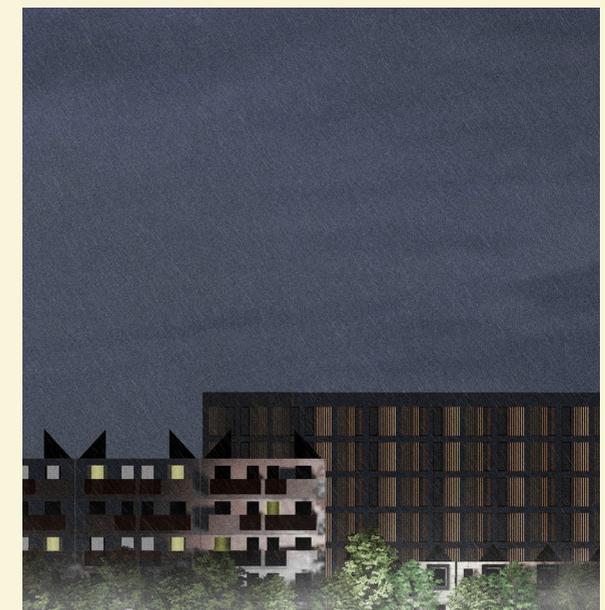
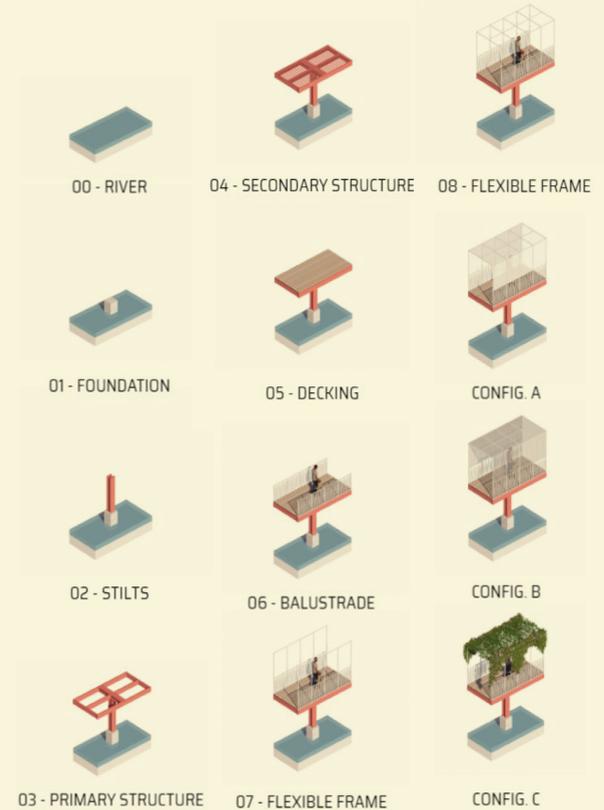
The overarching approach is to adapt to the technological innovations of today. The use of modular construction for any additional river structures will allow the Blue Line to be built quickly, cheaply, and most importantly efficiently. The use of additive modules also allows for flexibility, and for the Blue Line to adapt to the changes of its context.

The Use of Textiles

Reflecting to the city's historical past and prominence during the Industrial Revolution, the materiality of textiles and fabric will be used as a form of enclosure, providing shelter and safety front the environment to the users. The opportunity to use a range of different fabric colours also provides a joyful and playful environment.

Interacting with Art

The Blue Line will be more than just a connection, more than a method of transportation, it will be a place where everyone and anyone can experience different interactions. The inclusion of art installations will also provide opportunities for different artists within Manchester to showcase their work and inspire the city.



Landscaping & Furniture Strategy

Surface Materials

We have looked into the use of different surface materials for different purposes, with a concept of contrasting industrial and natural elements with the use of different colours to define different spaces and pathways for activity, walking, cycling and interaction with water.



Threshold Treatments

We have explored the different threshold treatments for adjacent functions. It may be vegetations, furnitures, change in levels, and simply contrasting material surfaces.



Split Levels

There are varying river bank levels. We have looked into splitting the river banks into different levels for different types of activities and users. This concept has been further developed in site C which will be explained in a later section.

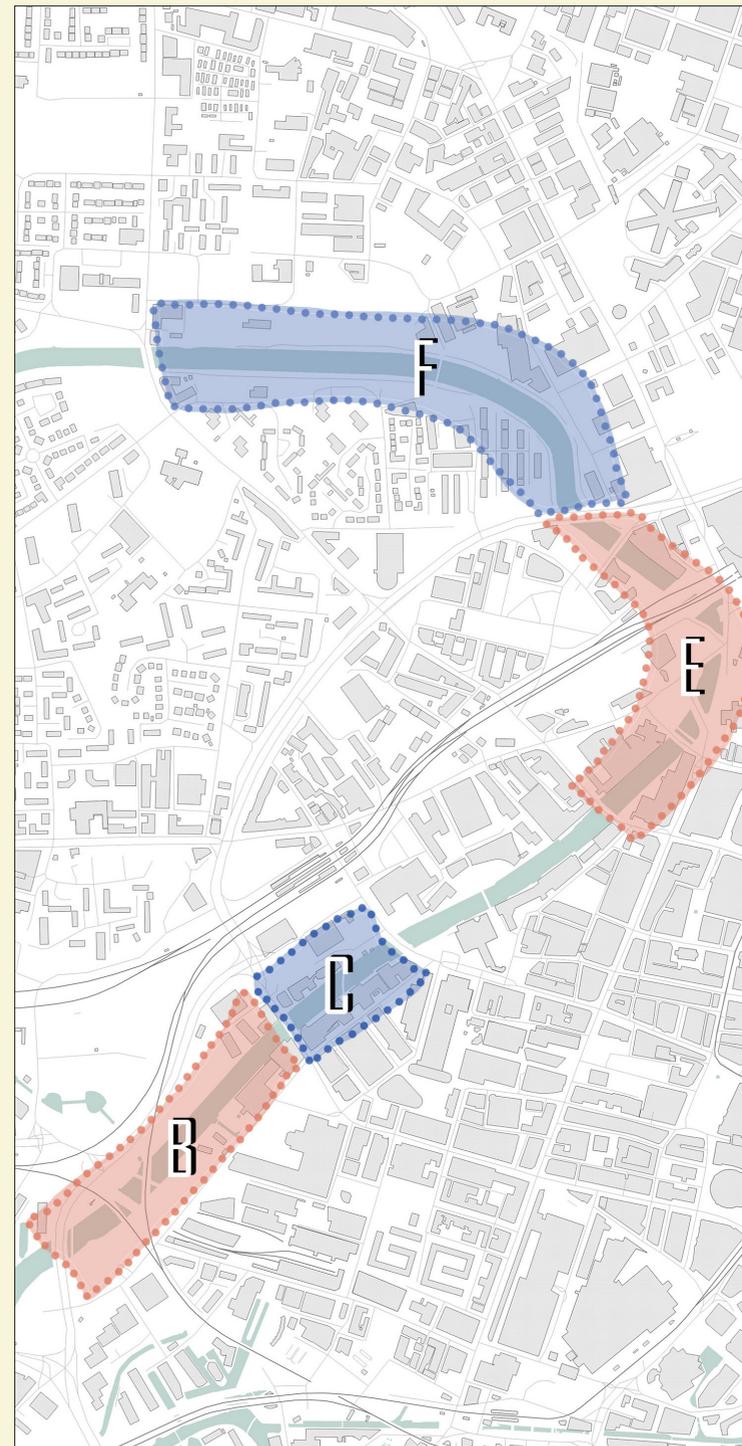


Incorporation of Urban Furniture

We have explored a few prototypes of furniture which can be incorporated along the river course. Apart from typical basic benches and tiered seating across split levels, we have come up with submerged spaces which allows people to step down to the water. There are also modular furniture which can be slotted in different ways for different uses.

Site Specific Strategies

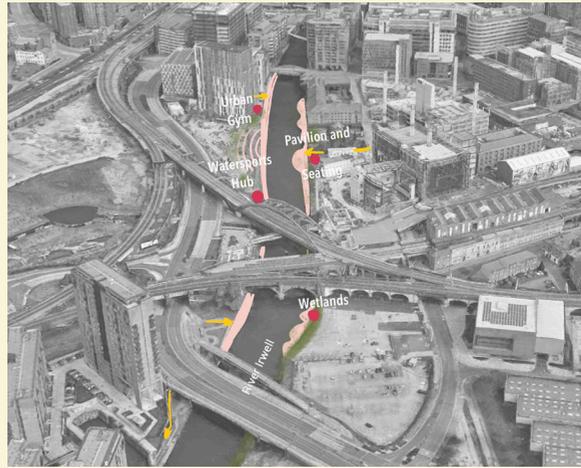
The riverside had previously been divided into potential sites by our partner, Urbansplash, we adopted four of the seven identified by them to examine in more detail.



Site B

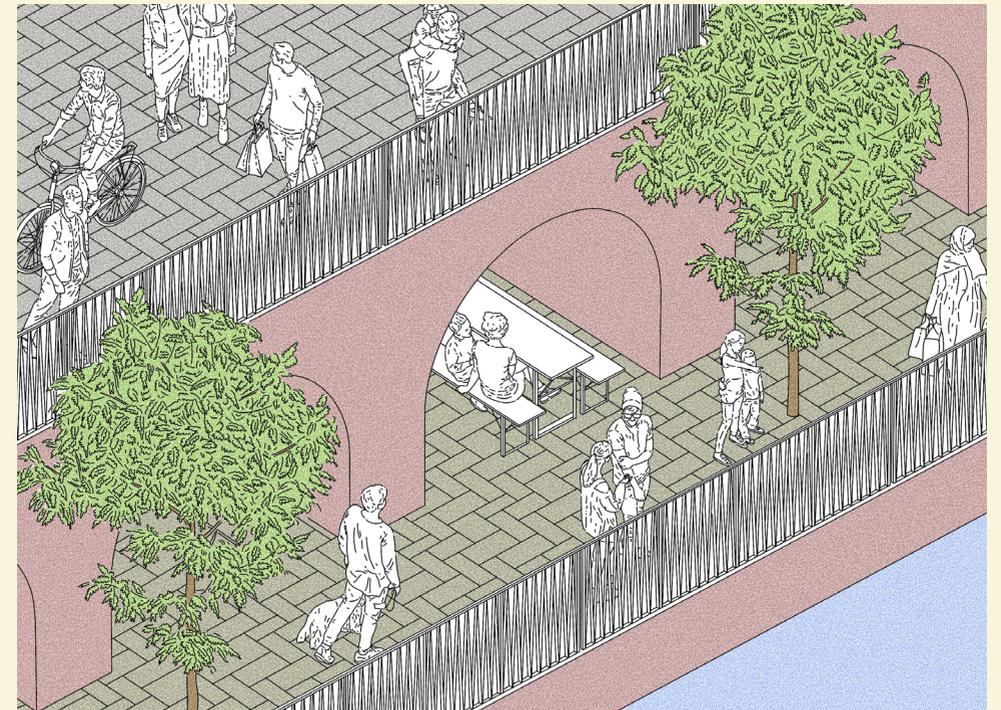
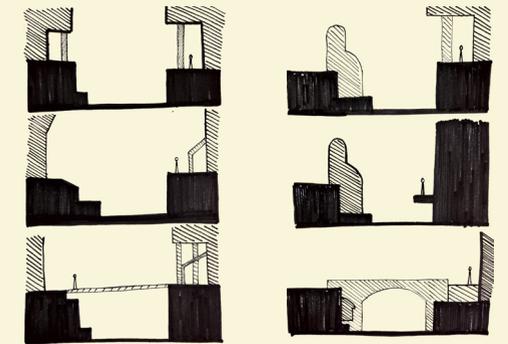
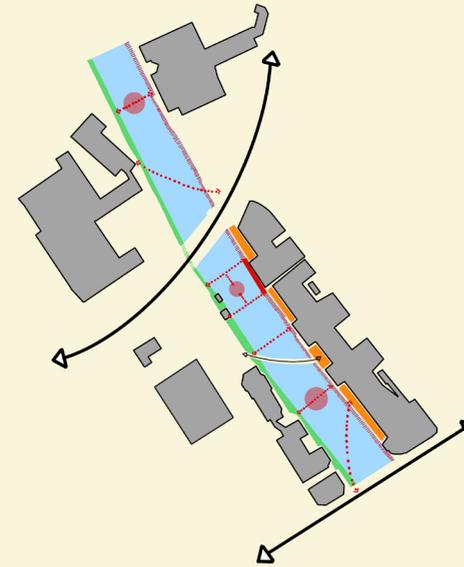
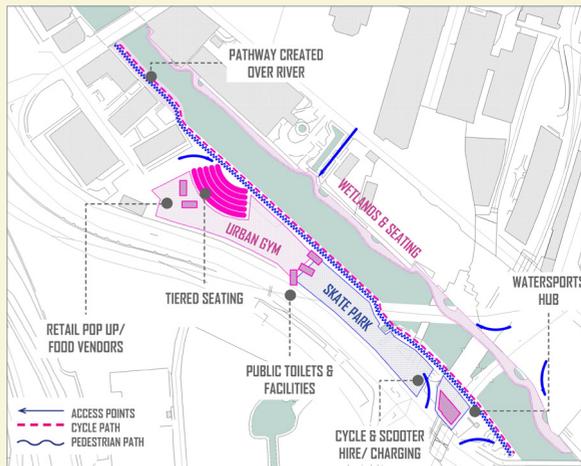
Site B is located to the south end of the site near Regent Road and Trinity Way. The site borders several high rise apartment buildings to the west and multiple industrial units to the east. The character of the site is defined by high walls lining the river, a series of bridges creating sheltered space and overgrown planting obstructing the walkway.

We propose a continuous linear route along the west bank with space identified for exercise activities for the surrounding residents such as a skate park, tiered seating addressing the site topography and an urban gym. We are also proposing a wetlands landscape walkway on the east bank that takes into consideration the industrial materiality of the site and the incorporation of natural wild planting.



Site C

Located at the heart of Spinningfield, site C is surrounded by offices and restaurants, with an existing bridge that links Manchester and Salford. A disused structure formerly known as Mark Addy Bar can be found with its abandoned arches and severed river pathways. The objective is to provide a new river connection through an additional structure that would allow access to a floating island. The importance of reactivating the disused structure, reusing the arches, and opening up the closed pathways are also displayed.



Site E

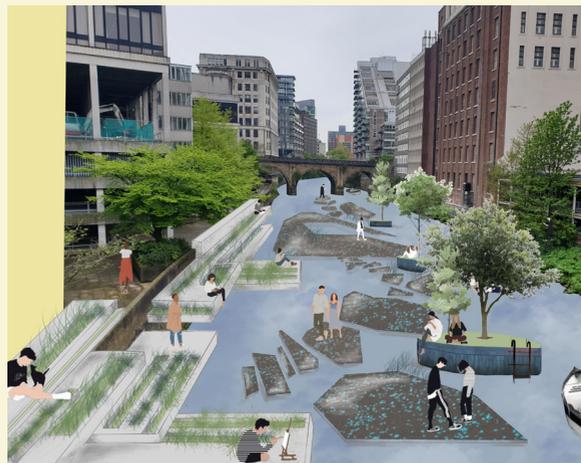
Site E is located to the North of the city centre, neighbouring Manchester Cathedral. Currently the site is rather barren with little to no existing walkways which address the river, presenting the opportunity for us to incorporate some walkways which create a relationship with the water. There are many disused archways dotted around the site and numerous bridges which present a potential safety threat as the space beneath them is very dark.



As a group we chose to take a contextual stance to design, providing a series of outdoor seating arrangements for existing bars and cafes within the area, branching down to water level and offering a different perspective of the river. Furthermore, we considered the reuse strategy of the archways surrounding the site, creating a hub of cafes, bars, popup shops, exhibition spaces etc. which branches over the river, allowing boats to pass beneath.



An interactive walkway consisting of a series of steppingstones and small 'islands' has been incorporated into the design to encourage interaction with the river in shallow waters. The island concept has also been continued further down the river in site D with a larger 'island' for events.



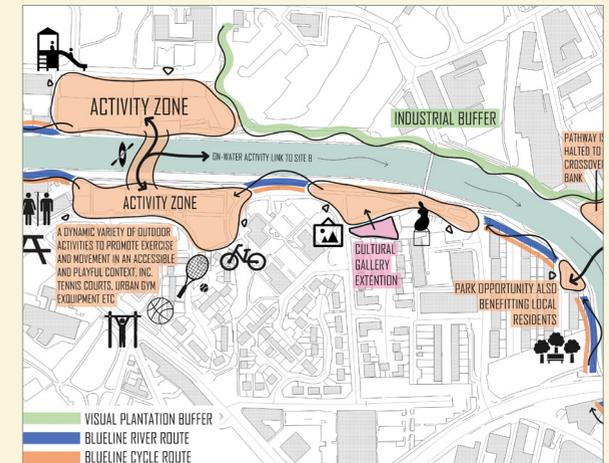
Illuminated art installations will be installed beneath bridges to provide a unique but safe experience for users. All design elements are linked by a walkway which branches onto the river.

Site F

Through Site F, the river pathway widens and its immediate context becomes less urban. There is opportunity to expand the riverbank into unused, adjacent land, developing the pathways to include further plantation and vegetation.

Our proposal develops the south bank, forming an area for activity and an urban gym to promote exercise and playful movement within the city centre. This strategy aims to create further public engagement from the local residential community and to provide reason to visit this far north of the river. This increased footfall should create a natural surveillance over the area - currently notorious for crime and anti-social behaviour.

The reoccurring kayak imagery is representative of a collaborative scheme with Site B - bringing on-water activity to the River Irwell and connecting up all sites in the process.



Digital Infrastructure

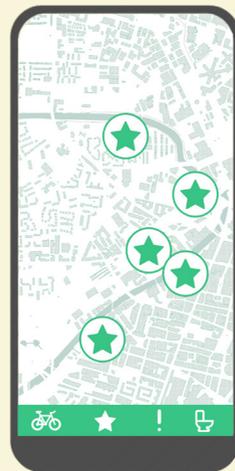
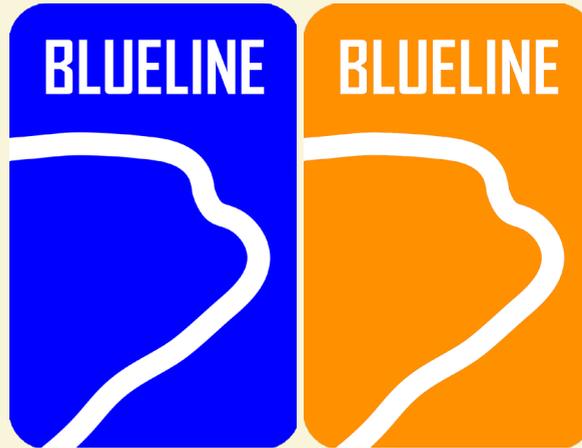
To establish a digital as well as physical infrastructure for the river irwell Blueline we have proposed an app that provides multiple aspects of wayfinding through along the site.

We have proposed that the app includes an events map for tourism, a public facility map for inclusivity and accessibility, a scooter and bike map to promote green transport, and a safety map where users can log incidents and safety concerns to keep the community safe around the clock.

The app create a way for users to interact with multiple features of the Blueline including a means of transaction with services, hiring scooters and bikes as well as logging activity using the urban gym to name a few.

We have also considered this means of interaction in the form of a physical scannable card for users who do not use mobile phones.

The key aim of this app is to frame the Blueline project and the River lwell as the main orientation point for the city as well as making the project safe, inclusive and accessible for all.



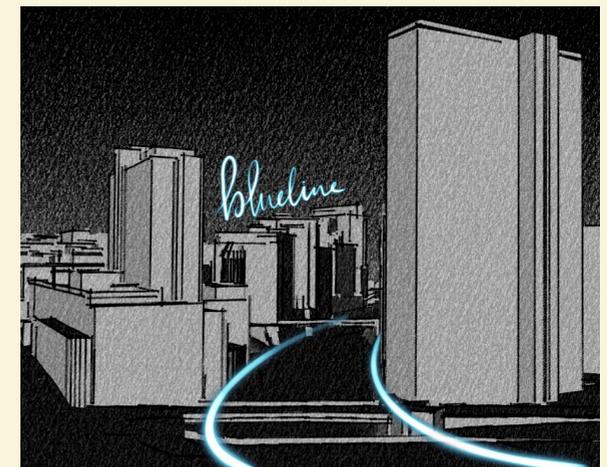
BA Reflections

The BA students were asked to produce an image in response to the question, 'what has this project meant to you?' The following are some reflections from the students.

"Nature in all forms will always be a safe space, a shelter from the concrete giants that attack our mental health. This BLUE LINE project demonstrated that blue can also be the next zen green."

"The project brings the natural element back into the urban landscape. In order to do so, all aspects encourage the public to interact with the proposal. The process has been inspiring to me since we were able to put together various ideas in a short amount of time. I've always been curious as to how such a large scale project is realised and I think the past two weeks have shown me that team engagement and enthusiasm can lead to a well thought-out comprehensive proposal."

"Walking on the streets I've never gave much attention to the inconspicuous river that bends around the city of Manchester. This project was an eye opening experience for me to get to know more of the city that I'll be staying in for the next few years. I hope that some ideas in the group can be put to use in the revitalization project and I look forward to seeing the River Irwell becoming the heart of Manchester one day."



ABOUT

Each year the MSA Live (formerly Events) programme unites M Arch. year 01 with B Arch. year 01 and 02 and M Land. Arch 01 in mixed-year teams to undertake live projects with external partners to create social impact.

LIVE PROJECTS

All MSA Live projects are live. A live project is where an educational organisation and an external partner develop a brief, timescale, and outcome for their mutual benefit.

SOCIAL IMPACT

All MSA Live projects have social impact. Social impact is the effect an organization's actions have on the well-being of a community. Our agendas are set by our external collaborators.

EXTERNAL PARTNERS

MSA LIVE projects work with many organisations: charities, community groups, social enterprises, community interest companies, researchers, practitioners and educators.

STUDENT-LED

Our MSA masters students take the lead in the project conception, brief development, delivery and co-ordination of a small project. Other cohorts join for an eventful 2 weeks of activities at the end of the academic year.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Working in teams within and across year groups and courses; MSA students participate in peer to peer learning. In addition, collaborators, participants and students engage in the transfer of tangible and intellectual property, expertise, learning and skills.

LARGE SCALE

This year approximately 600 students from 4 cohorts in MSA will work on 42 projects with partners.

QUESTIONS

For questions about MSA Live 21 contact MSA Live Lead: Becky Sobell:
b.sobell@mmu.ac.uk

BLOG

live.msa.ac.uk/2021

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