

# MANCHESTER SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

# SAVING HEIGHTS!



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**MSA  
LIVE 24**

## Team

**Luke Fiorini** (MArch1)

**Taisia Lukia** (MArch1)

**Jemy Xavier** (MArch1)

**Yan Gao** (Adaptive Reuse)

**Catherine Urbani** (BA1)

**James Cranston** (BA1)

**Jiya Phull** (BA1)

**Joshua Wilde** (BA1)

**Roxolana Gudzman** (BA1)

**Joe Bramham Butts** (BA2)

**Maria Fernanda Pires Trevisan** (BA2)

**Megan Allenson** (BA2)

**Norah Obialo** (BA2)

**Vasiliki Artinou** (BA2)

**Zoe Houlton** (BA2)

## Partners

Irlam O' Th' Height is a small Suburb of Salford within Greater Manchester. The area is on higher ground due to being located on top of the Irwell Vallery, hence the name 'Height.' 'Irlam' is derived from the Irlam family name that ran the Pack Horse Inn in the 17th and 18th Centuries.

The site, a public library and former youth club building, is central to the community of Irlam O' Th' Height. The library which is currently active has been serving the community for over 120 years and is one of Salford's oldest public libraries. The brief, set out by our collaborator Christine, is to restore the former youth club area of the building into a sustainable, inclusive and inviting community facility which will serve to reduce social isolation in the community and be accessible by all.

The facility will be able to hold events that aim to support and educate residents in general health and well-being in light of recent events such as the pandemic and the cost of living crisis. The project also aims to tackle issues on sustainability and environmental responsibility.

Built aspects of the brief include the installation of a whole food cafe which will focus on the encouragement of healthy nourishment and convince residents to refrain from consuming ultra processed foods. The hall and stage is to be refurbished to working order so that local performances and sports activities can take place for the community to partake in.

For this project we are partnered with our collaborator, Christine, local residents, staff of the Heights Public Library and members of Salford City Council.

# Introduction



## Saving Heights!

Members of Salford City Council and the Height Community Group have been extensively looking into the possibility of restoring the former Height youth centre into a modern community hub for residents and other nearby community members. The building needs both internal restoration and adaptation as well as needing some landscaping.

The project aims to bring the building back to use and secure its longevity whilst also embracing the existing bowling green and library. The project will aim to create a circular connection so that all three main aspects are interconnected as one whilst serving both immediate and long term community needs. The hall will have a focus on the embracing the arts, public education and healthy living all while bringing together a wide demographic of residents and connecting people of various social standings. The hall should prioritise networking and social experiences therefore the overall design needs to have multi-functionalism in mind in order to achieve this.

The hall will also become a centre for enterprise and education, offering the opportunity for members of the community to partake in workshops and having spaces dedicated to professional work as an alternative to working from home. The main hall and stage area can be used to host small in-door market events as well as be used for local performances in theatre and music. This would create opportunities for employment and could lead to improved economic activity.


The building itself would help to give Irlam O' Th' Height's a distinctive identity that residents can be proud of, injecting a sense of comradery and connection between the different communities of Salford and leading to opportunities of revitalisation. Overall the hall will become a destination for everyone in the locality to benefit from.

# SITE CONTEXT

Irlam O' Th' Height is a small Suburb of Salford within Greater Manchester. The area is on higher ground due to being located on top of the Irwell Vallery, hence the name 'Height.' 'Irlam' is derived from the Irlam family name that ran the Pack Horse Inn in the 17th and 18th Centuries.



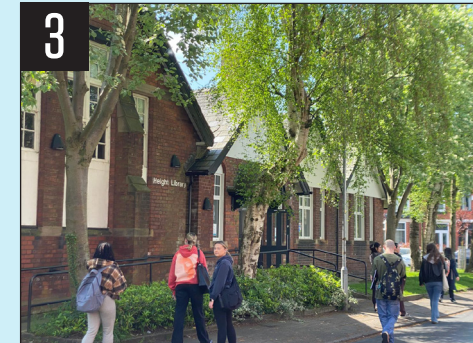
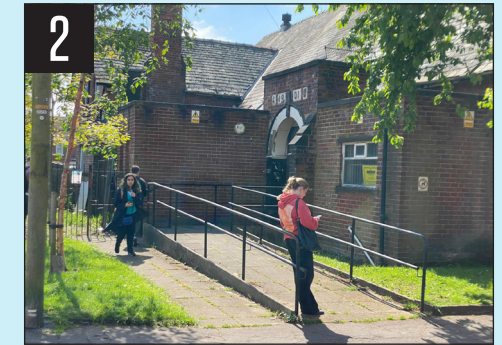
During the site visits, students had the opportunity to explore the building's exterior. See next page for corresponding photos.

 Site Boundary

# SITE VISIT



Day 1 of MSA Live began with a site visit to Irlam O' Th' Height, where students took part in a tour given by the groups collaborator, Christine. Students had the opportunity to engage with staff in the library and query the brief, developing their understanding of the area.



- 1 Group photo in front of building
- 2 Main building entrance
- 3 Library entrance
- 4 Bowling green terrace
- 5 View from the bowling green
- 6 Bowling green entrance



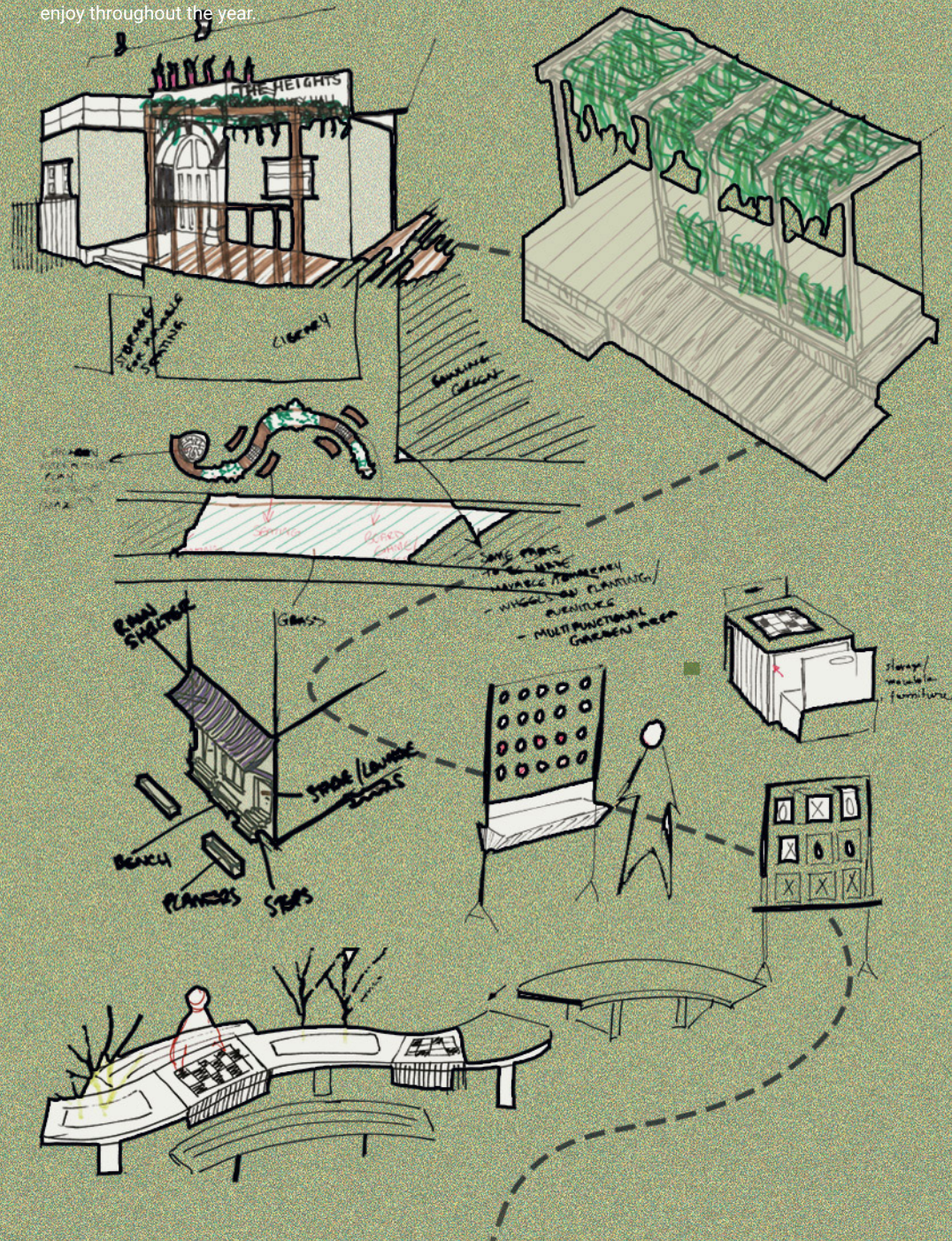
## SKETCH WORKSHOP

Students developing their site observation skills through the simple process of sketching the building exterior and surrounding area.



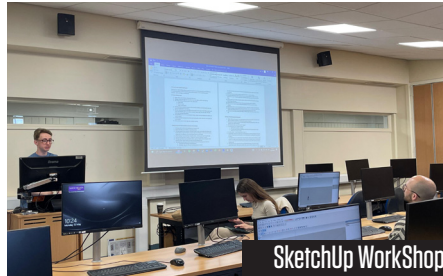
## CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Students were encouraged to develop ideas for the proposal through several sketching and diagramming sessions. Ideas included a timber cafe terrace, outdoor games areas and shaded spaces for people to enjoy throughout the year.



# SOFTWARE WORKSHOPS

Following the conceptual development stage, it was essential to translate these ideas into precise architectural drawings. To facilitate this, workshops on architectural software were conducted to assist students with the design process. AutoCAD and SketchUp workshops were conducted by M.Arch1 students to enhance the software proficiency of BA1 and BA2 students.



These sessions were engaging and interactive, proving highly beneficial in aiding the participants with the design tasks for the Heights Public Hall. The workshops provided an in-depth understanding of these powerful design tools, equipping the students with essential skills for digital drafting and 3D modelling



In the subsequent days, the students utilized the newly acquired software skills to develop flexible layouts and innovative furniture arrangements for the hall.

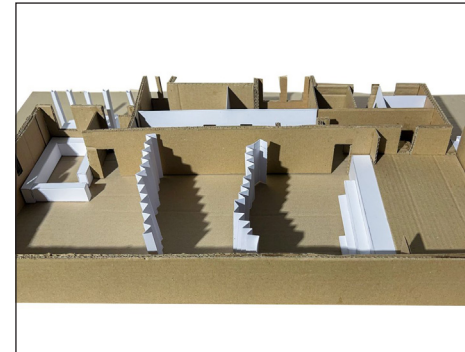
They employed AutoCAD for precise drawings of interior furniture layouts, ensuring accuracy. SketchUp was used to create 3d model of the site context, allowing them to visualize and iterate on their designs in a virtual environment.



This integration of software tools into the design process facilitated a more comprehensive exploration of spatial configurations and materiality. The students were able to experiment with various design solutions, optimizing the functionality and aesthetics of the Heights Public Hall.



# MODEL WORKSHOP

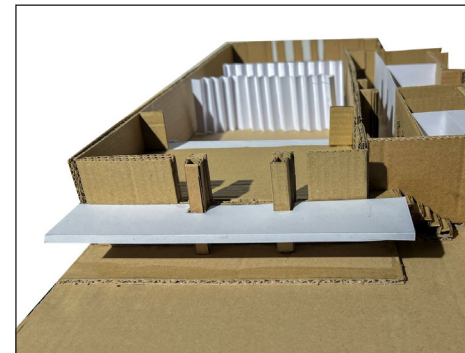


Elevated terrace access via the existing fire stair that is located on the bowling terrace.

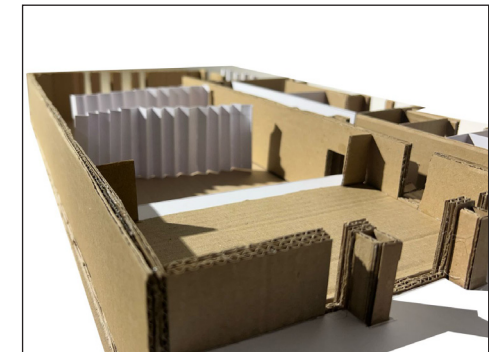
Students were encouraged to participate in a model workshop, where physical model making skills could be practiced using simple brown and white card, representing existing and new build elements. The workshop engaged the students understanding of the space whilst also fostering essential model making techniques which will be very useful in their future careers.



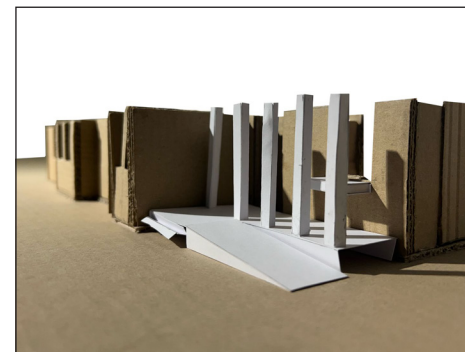
Elevated terrace area which opens the inside of the building to the lush bowling green.



Stage area of the building, which can be used for live performances and educational events.



Main building access from the front, where visits will have access the cafe and main hall spaces.

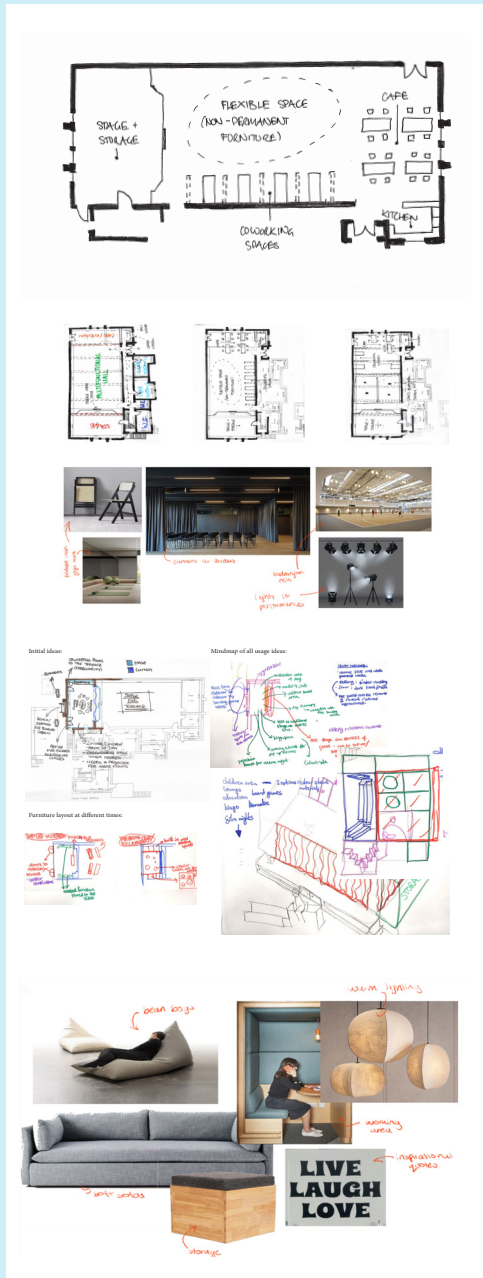


# SPACE CONFIGURATION

The design development stages encompassed the creation of functional diagrams and the strategic zoning of internal spaces to ensure flexibility and accommodate multi-functional activities. These diagrams were meticulously refined into floor plans, incorporating considerations of materiality and furniture layouts. Various furniture arrangements and material choices were explored in these plans before finalizing the overall theme. The paramount requirement for the hall was the flexibility of layouts.

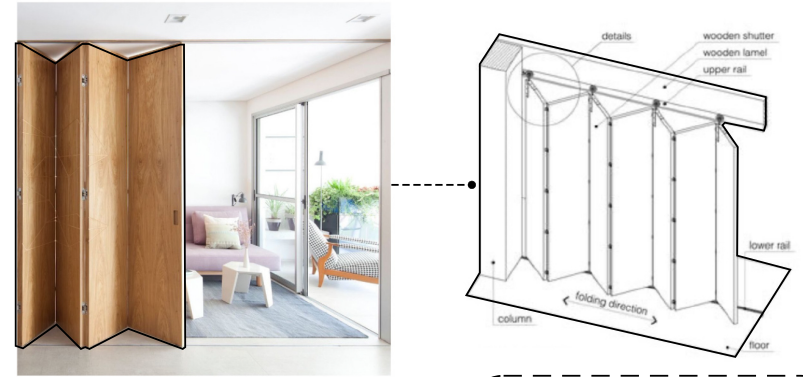
A critical element for achieving this flexibility was the incorporation of operable partitions. These partitions allow for dynamic reconfiguration of the room layouts to suit the daily requirements. Additionally, the hall design featured easily movable and storable seating furniture, enhancing the space's adaptability.

Another key consideration was the inclusion of modular kitchen furniture. This feature supports functions such as cooking classes and facilitates the transition of activities to the landscape area when necessary. By integrating these elements, the design ensures that the Heights Public Hall can seamlessly adapt to a wide range of uses and events, offering a versatile and functional space.

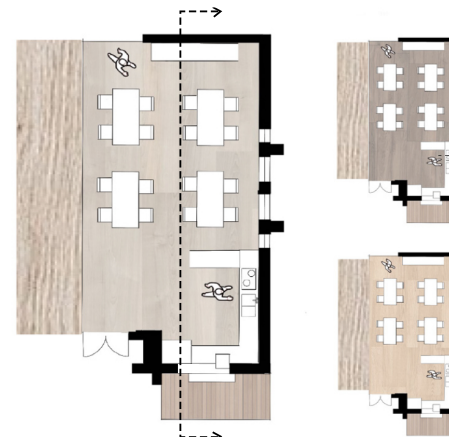


# INTERIOR DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

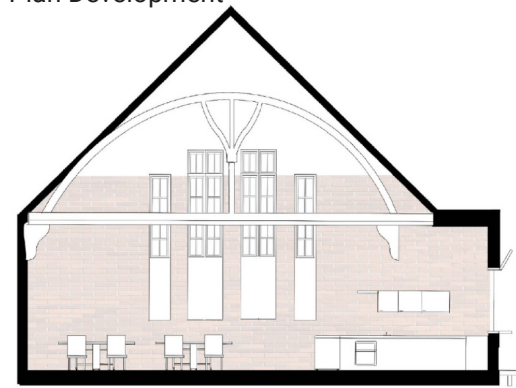
Operable Partitions



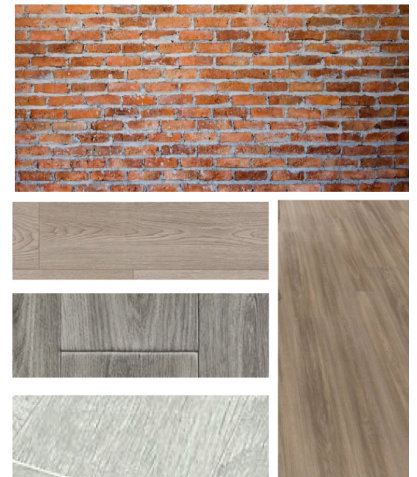
Plan Development



Section Development



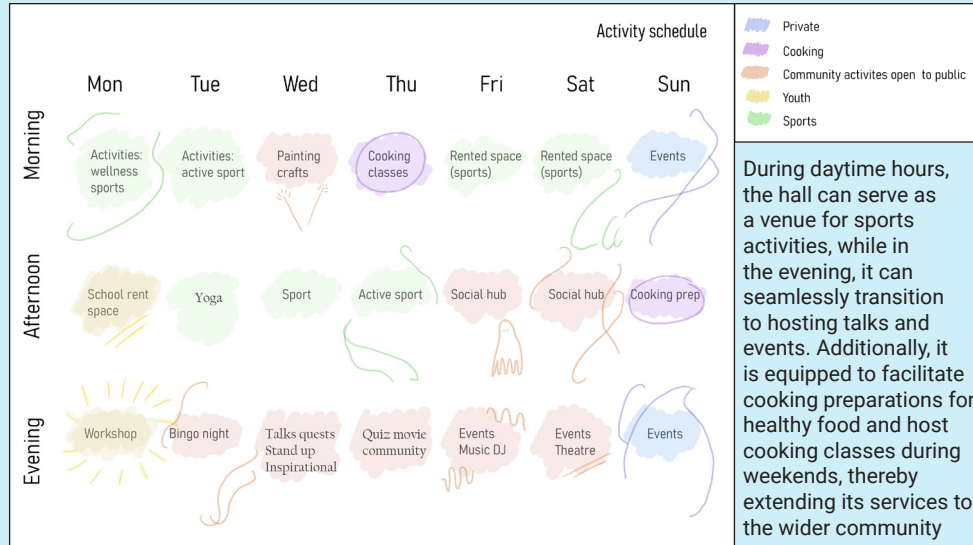
Material Palette



Flexible Furnitures



## TIMETABLE OF ACTIVITIES



## BUILDING EXTERIOR

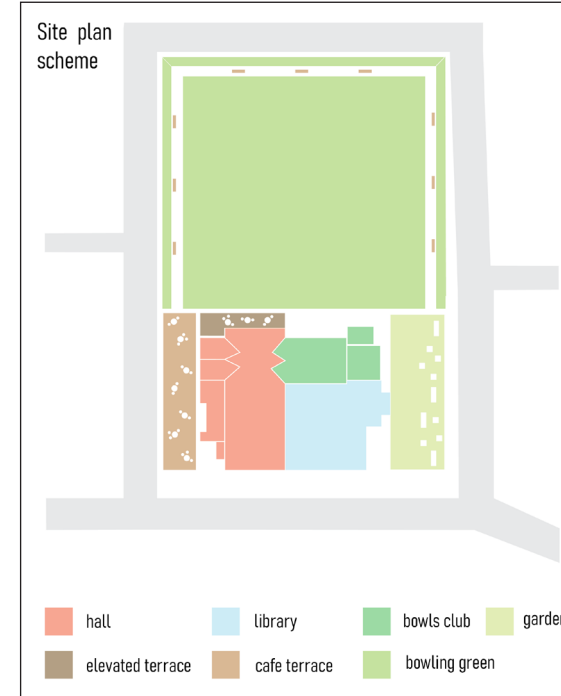
1. The area around the entrance to the Height Public Hall is quite small however there is a possibility to create an access to the coffee window and arrange a small cafe terrace along the street.

2. Growing herbs and vegetables in small allotments will promote healthy food culture and engage the local community, moveable furniture offers opportunities for re-configuration.

3. The stage at the rear of the building can open up onto an elevated terrace area allowing people to enjoy the bowling green from within the building.



## SITE LANDSCAPING



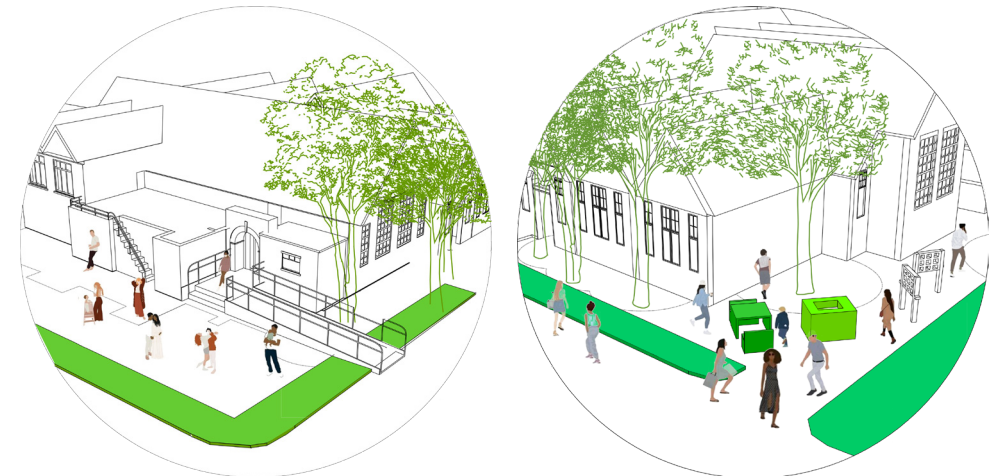
The development of the landscaping proposal saw the students explore different design possibilities through the sketching, modelling and collaging workshops. The final proposal utilises every square inch of the building exterior, including the bowling green.

The main spaces include an elevated terrace area, a community raised bed garden and a cafe terrace situated through the entrance of the building. The main challenge was trying to fit all these elements into the small spaces that were available as we could not exceed outside of the building limits.

Students had to consider how building and bowling green access would continue with the new landscaping elements and when necessary consider alternative access routes to the main areas.

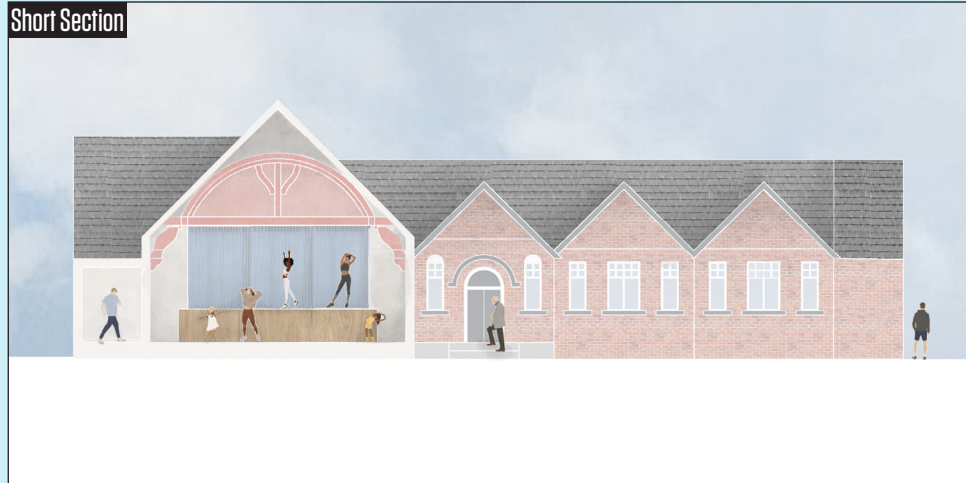
As a result, the schemes allows for the continual access of hall, library and bowls club aspects of the building.

## BUILDING ACCESS

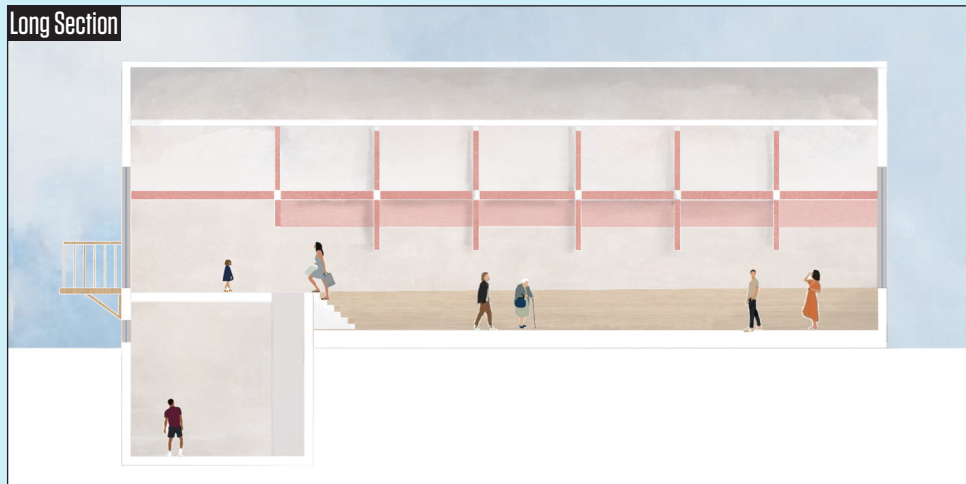


The two diagrams above are a students representation of how the building exterior might be utilise for both access and recreational use. The left image shows the main entrance and the cafe terrace while the right image shows how the raised bed area might be used for outdoor recreational activities.

## SECTION DRAWINGS



Short section facing south showing some internal and external activity. The original library entrance is still accessible for those who wish to use the library without having to walk through the hall entrance where public activities may be taking place. The stage can be utilised for activities such as yoga, cooking classes, educational presentations, theatre, dance and music performances. Minimal intervention to the main space means it can be used for almost all kinds of activities.



Long section facing east showing the grandeur of the main hall and terrace, as well as the storage area below. Collapsible steps mean that the stage can also be used as a study and work area when there are no activities taking place during the day. When performances are taking place access to the basement storage can be found via the trap door on the stage where a dolly can be used to hoist equipment from below.

## DESIGN RENDERERS

Flexibility in layout design is a significant aspect for the Heights Hall. The necessity to accommodate multi-functional activities and adapt to daily changes in function demands the integration of highly versatile furniture. The stage area of the hall constitutes a fundamental aspect of the architectural design. The tiered seating positioned in front of the stage not only offers ample seating space but also integrates steps adjacent to it, serving as access points to the stage. Collapsible partitions or curtains are employed to delineate the stage functions from the rest of the hall when events are not in progress.



Building access was considered, whereby the entrance to the hall along with the cafe terrace had to be as inviting as possible in order to accommodate community members who are dealing with social anxiety. The coffee window of the terrace became a prominent part of the brief, whereby visitors could still have access to hot beverages and baked goods without the need to enter the building if they wished. Flower and small tree plantings break up the solid appearance of the buildings corner entrance and a ramp provides wheelchair accessibility.

Adaptability was an essential aspect of the design brief, ensuring that the space can be reconfigured to meet varying needs efficiently. An essential feature in achieving this flexibility is the use of operable partitions, which allow for dynamic zoning of different areas within the hall. These partitions enable the transformation of spaces into smaller, functional zones, enhancing the hall's versatility. In addition, incorporating modular kitchen units in the café zone provides substantial benefits.





## ABOUT

Each year the MSA LIVE programme unites Masters Architecture year 1 and Masters of Architecture & Adaptive Resuse students with those in BA foundation, year 1 and year 2 and Masters Landscape Architecture 1 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 are for community benefit or 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 joined 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 6 cohorts in MSA have worked on 40 projects with partners.

## QUESTIONS

For questions about MSA LIVE please contact the MSA LIVE team:

**[msalive@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:msalive@mmu.ac.uk)**

## BLOG

**[live.msa.ac.uk/2024](http://live.msa.ac.uk/2024)**

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