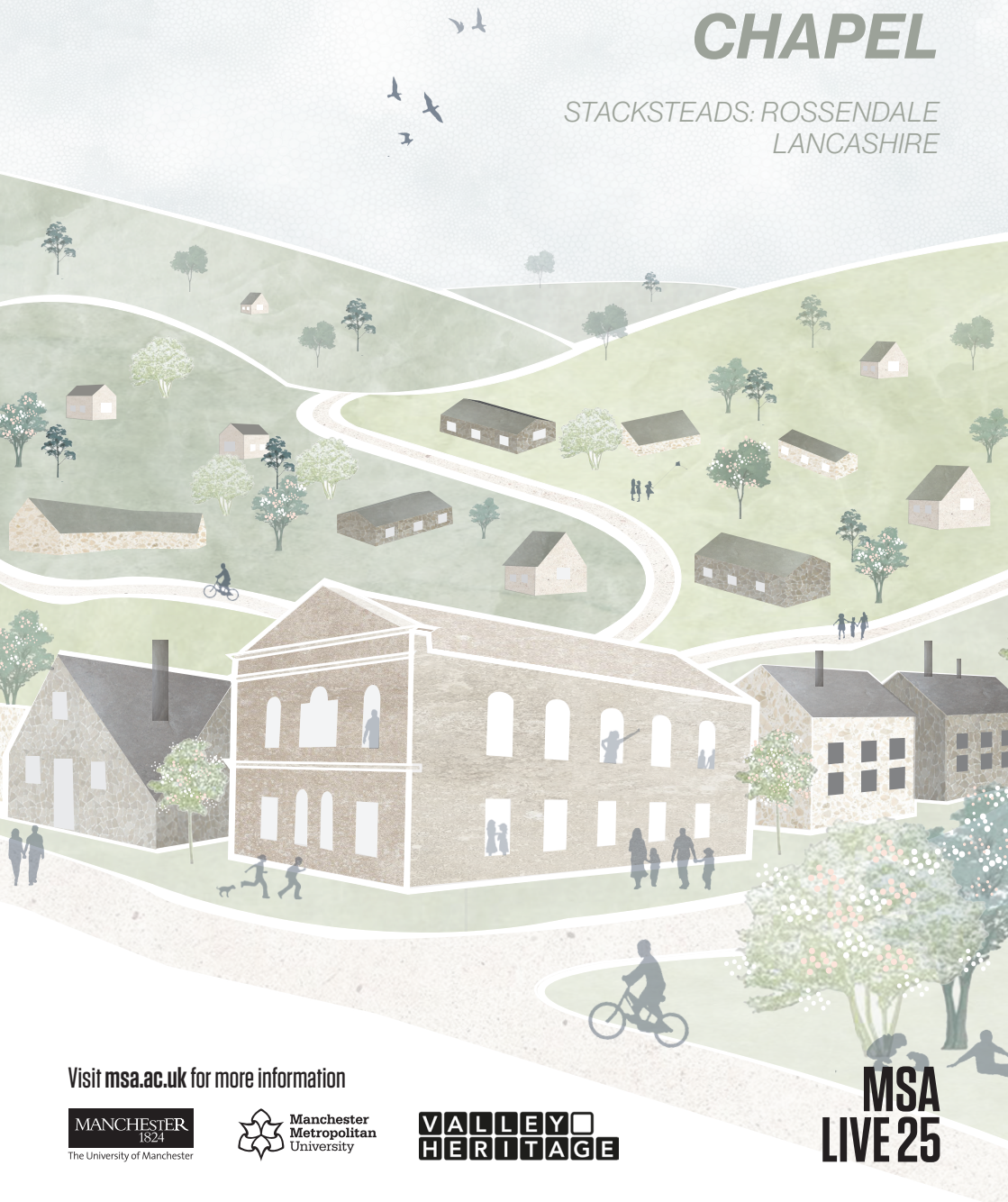


**MANCHESTER SCHOOL
OF ARCHITECTURE**

REIMAGINING WATERBARN CHAPEL

STACKSTEADS: ROSSENDALE
LANCASHIRE



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**VALLEY
HERITAGE**

**MSA
LIVE 25**

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The Rossendale borough of Lancashire is known for its incredible heritage assets from its industrial past. Yet, most are neglected and under utilised.

Valley Heritage, established in 2015, aims to breathe new life into these sites to bring them back into social beneficiary use.

The charity is run by volunteers such as Stephen Anderson, Jo Strachan-O'Donnell and Mhorag Saxon who directly collaborated with us for this project.

Valley Heritage work alongside local community groups, such as Rossendale Civic Trust and Rossendale Heritage Network, which were involved in public consultation for this project.

The Alliance Building, in Bacup, is Valley Heritage's headquarters, which was kindly used as a space to host a public consultation during the two action weeks.

Introduction

Reimagining Waterbarn Chapel

The Waterbarn Chapel, a baptist church built in 1847, is located in the heart of Stacksteads, Bacup. It consists of a chapel at the front and Sunday school at the back. Once a vital part of the community, it started to decline in the 1990s, and permanently closed in 2010. Several fires have occurred over time, damaging the chapel, including the caving in of its roof. This has rendered the building unsafe, with it now being fenced off and inaccessible.

The Grade II Listed status further adds to the challenge, and there have been many failed proposals overtime being rejected due to unviability. The lack of use and continued decay of the chapel has left many residents angered and wishing that the chapel could be demolished.

Valley Heritage have presented this challenge to our team, to reimagine the Waterbarn Chapel into conceptual options. The primary aim is for the designs to be economically viable, so they can be priced up and presented to potential clients. In addition, powerful imagery needs to be produced to persuade locals that the Waterbarn Chapel is worth saving.



Understanding the Context

With the lack of existing information available and site inaccessibility, we had to get our investigative caps on. We worked collaboratively to gather information about the site and were impressed by the undergraduates' enthusiasm and efficiency.

Existing Drawings

The lack of planning applications or existing drawings took us back to basics. We started with traditional methods, by using maps and proportions to gain a relatively accurate estimation of site dimensions so that we could draw up existing drawings.

Model Making

We used these drawings to create two models: a physical (next page), and digital. These aided our understanding of the massing, and can be used to develop and present our future designs.

Historical Analysis

To further our understanding, we searched through historic archives, community forums, demographics, and existing photos. We used forensic architecture methods, by annotating photos of the ruin, to try and establish what was there before. The Masters students introduced the undergraduates to heritage significance, as we tried to prioritise what to retain or restore.

Image Top (Left):
Digital massing model.

Image Middle Top (Left)
Existing Floorplan.

Image Middle Bottom (Left)
Photograph Inside the Waterbarn Chapel after fire damage.

Image Bottom (Left):
Presenting findings to each other.

Image Bottom (This page):
Existing elevations

Image Top (Right):
Site Plan

Image Bottom (Right)
Examples of Research.
Previous Church Usage,
Forensic Architecture
Overlay



West



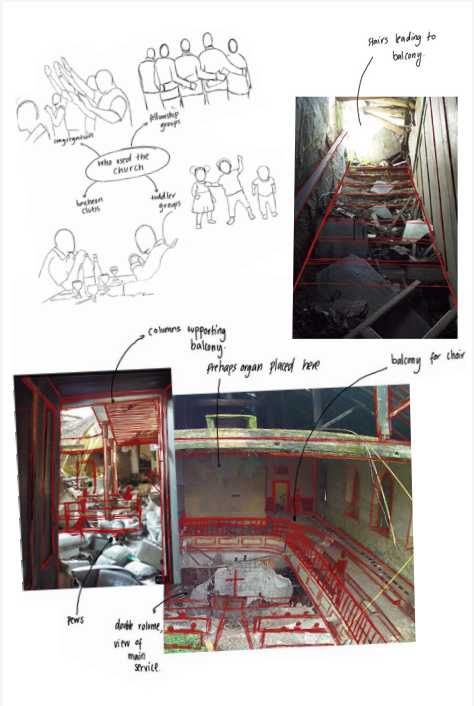
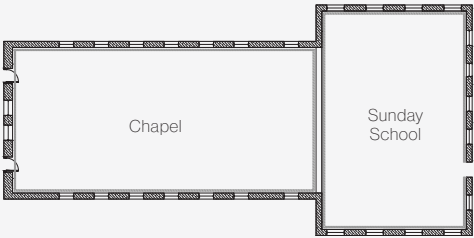
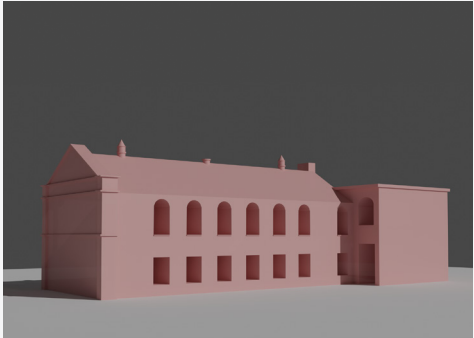
South



East



North



Initial Designs

Housing

Initially we were briefed by Valley Heritage to design the building as some sort of housing, as it seemed the most viable option.

During the first action week, we presented this task to the undergraduates. The Masters students introduced them to important aspects of residential design including Building Regulations (particularly Part M for accessibility, Part B for fire safety and Part L for thermal efficiency), the Nationally Described Space Standards, working with listed buildings and the typical planning constraints. We explained the responsibility as architects to consider these aspects early in the design phase so they don't become secondary, and instead can be used as key drivers in the design phase.

We looked at two options: transitional housing (with shared facilities), and traditional housing. We split the undergraduates into teams to iteratively design these, with discussions and reflections throughout.

These were brought to the public consultation, to allow the design to be iterated further by local feedback.

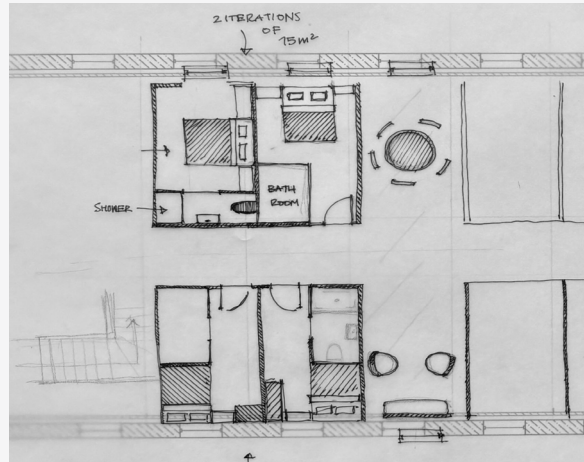
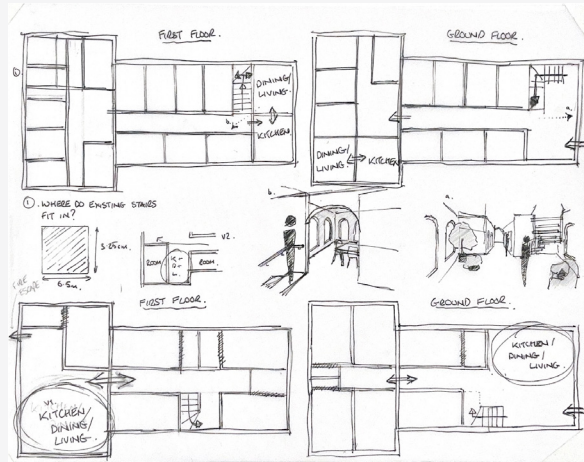


Image Top (Left)
Initial sketch floor plan options to see how many housing units could fit into the chapel.

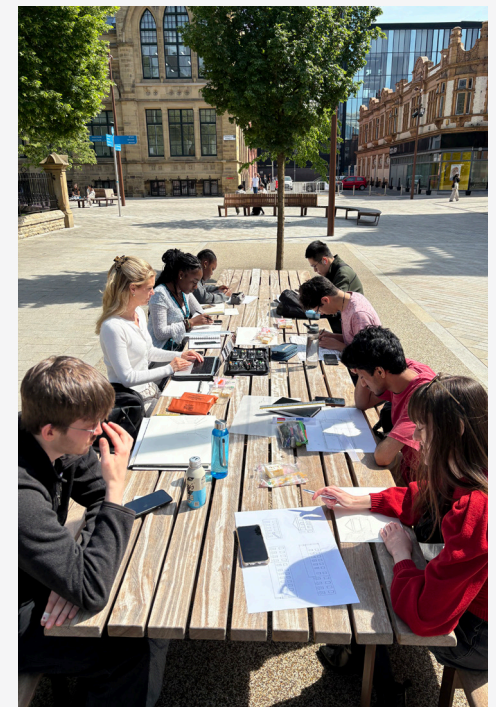
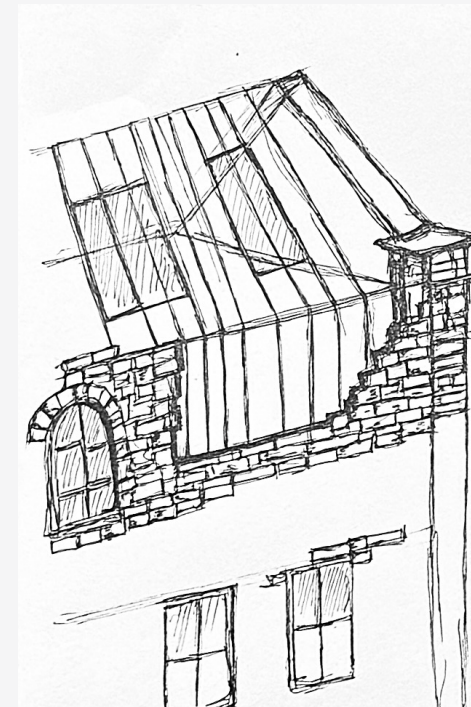
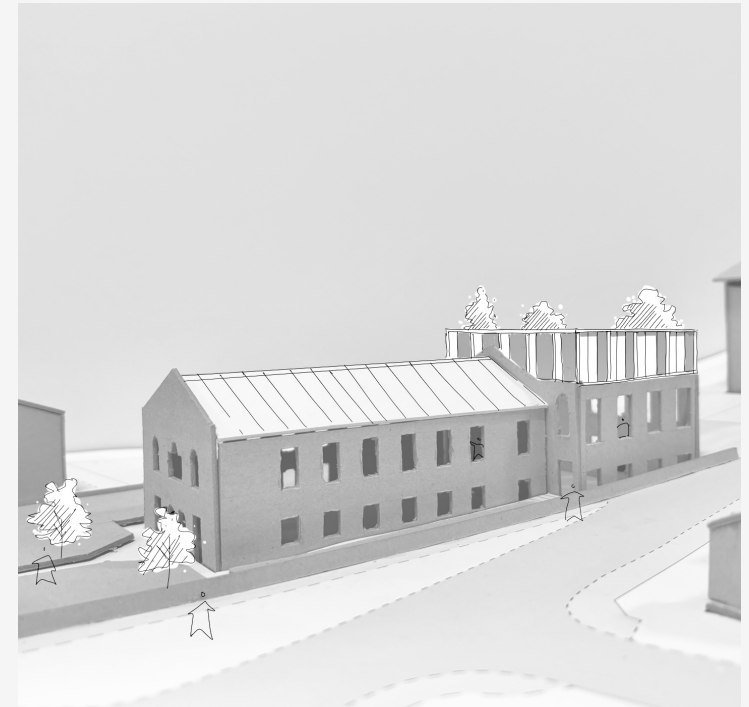
Image Middle (Left)
Floorplan options for bedrooms (with shared living), using Building Regulations.

Image Bottom (Left)
The model making team, busy making the site model.

Image Top (Right)
Mixed media model / sketch exploring adding an extra storey on the back to improve viability.

Image Bottom (Right)
Sketching is more fun outside! We made the most of the sun to get our creativity flowing.

Image Bottom (Below)
Sketch exploring the option of embracing the ruin, and building a new structure inside.





Public Consultation

Planning & Process

None of us had ever conducted a public consultation before, so we began by researching different approaches. This included studying theory such as 'Architecture & Participation' by Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu, and Jeremy Till (2005).

A key step was prior consultation with Valley Heritage, who shared past challenges with low attendance and limited openness among participants. To address this, we ensured an extended online option was available, making the consultation more accessible and inclusive.

We prepared a range of materials to present at the consultation, including site analysis and archival photographs. We invited a local arts council; we prepared a collaborative task for them to draw new stained-glass windows for the Chapel. The actual attendance consisted of 10 members from local Heritage Groups, Rossendale Council, Valley Heritage, and Rossendale Civic Society. We gave each member space to share their thoughts, memories and concerns. Online, we offered an open-ended, wider community participation option to draw memories and imagine new spaces.

Outcome

The consultation exceeded expectations in participation and insight. While many attendees were volunteers or local authority representatives, highlighting the limits of a one-day event without broader promotion, their contributions were highly informed and offered perspectives from the communities they work in.

Two conversations particularly shaped our direction. The first explored Rossendale's heritage assets, like Waterbarn Chapel, and the potential of adaptive reuse to reconnect Rossendale's divided villages through new, needed and shared spaces. The second conversation was more critical. One participant voiced frustration about the Chapel's long-standing disuse and questioned our early design strategy without knowing the entire context. While initially challenging, the conversation enhanced our knowledge of the Chapel. In addition, it allowed us to reflect on the responsibilities of architects, particularly in persuading and justifying additional costs to 'future-proof' the adaptive re-use of listed buildings, which are often excused from regulations.

Ultimately, the consultation deepened our understanding of the project and community. Had we more time, multiple consultations could have further shaped the outcome. That said, as a first experience, it was invaluable.

Image Top (Left)
We started the day by showing the undergraduates around Bacup, exploring its rich heritage assets and local character, questioning them what the community needs.

Image Top (Right)
Presenting our initial residential concepts to the consultees.

Image Bottom (Left)
Local community members vividly expressed their concerns regarding residential usage.

Image Bottom (Right)
Quickly adapting our consultation and design as the day went on.

Design Progression

Community Function: Embracing the Ruin

In response to the public consultation, we developed the design to include more of a community element. We were inspired by conversations around heritage, finding that the proposal should represent the site's wider history. With this, we are proposing to embrace the ruin of the Chapel, as this represents its recent history and we argue that it could empower the existing community.

We introduced the importance of viability to the undergraduates, and with this, aimed to keep the community function as low cost as possible. The initial activation of the site, promotes the re-connectivity between the community and the Chapel before it gets redeveloped.

Ideas of mimicking the gallery of the original building was a key concept in the design to restore the demolished concept. Therefore, the proposed steel galleries are demountable.

The economic activation was an important element highlighted by the collaborators. Therefore, we decided to retain some of the apartment functions and propose a pop-up market.

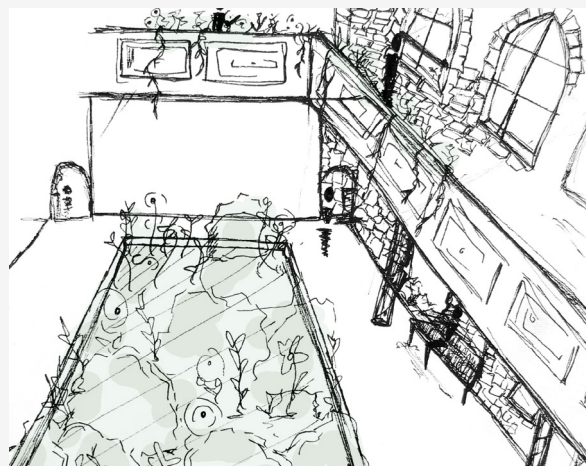
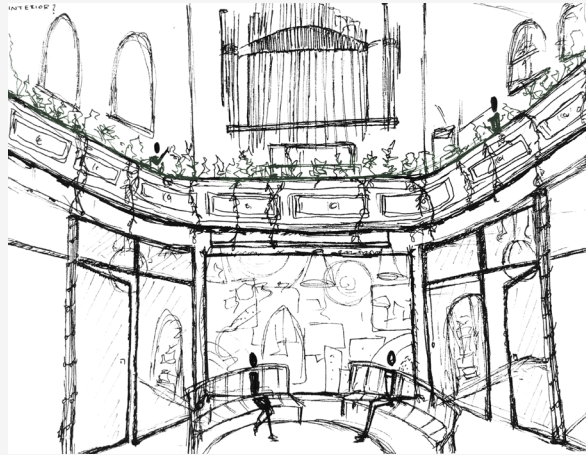


Image Top (Left)
Restoring the Gallery in the Chapel was a key concept.

Image Middle (Left)
A winter garden option to reduce costs while still reactivating the site.

Image Bottom (Left)
Emerging concept: central garden in the chapel.

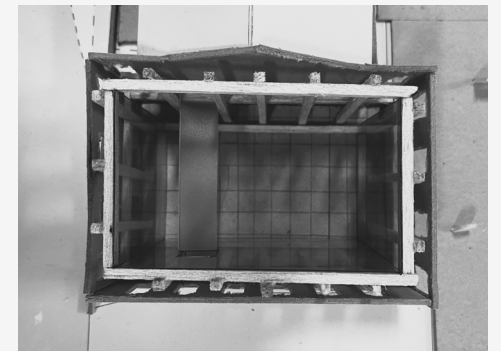
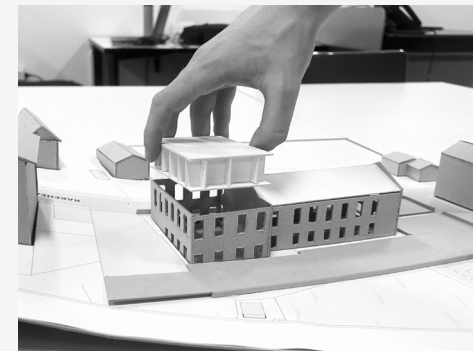
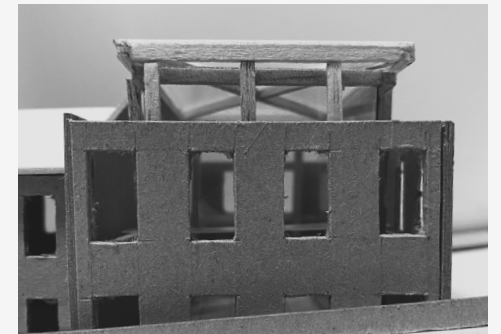
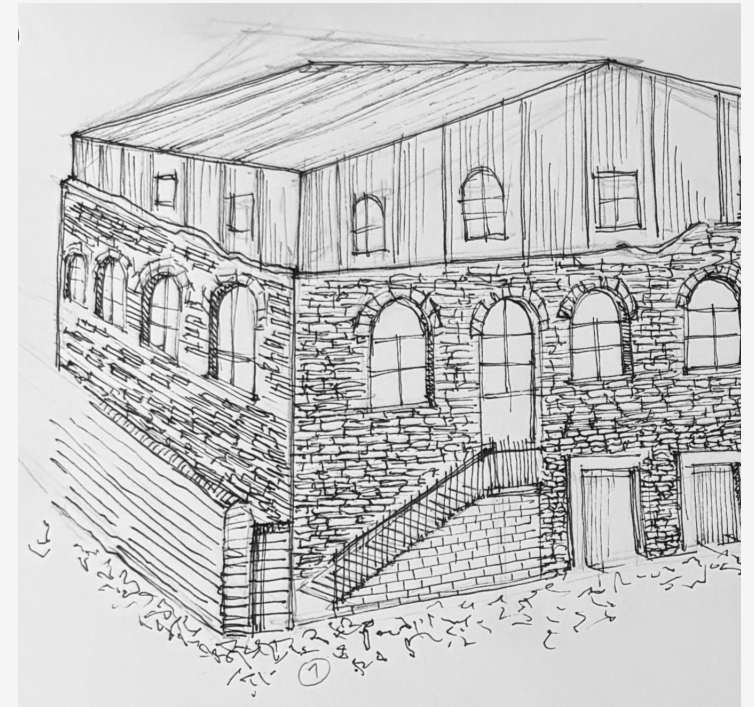
Image Top (Right)
Sketch option for an additional storey on the Sunday School.

Image Below (Middle)
We led the undergraduates to iteratively design by reflecting.

Image Below (Bottom)
Sketch model of an additional storey on the Sunday School.

Image Bottom (Right)
Sketch model - inside the winter garden space

Image Bottom (Middle)
Sketch model - a historically sensitive additional storey.



Final Concept

Phasing and Viability

Our design concept reimagines the Chapel as a community marketplace and garden with social housing. It proposes introducing the housing and community programs in phases to improve the viability and feasibility of the project - a key issues presented by the collaborators.

The first phase would preserve the Chapel's ruins as a monument to the past, allowing the existing graveyard and new community garden to inhabit the front of the Chapel. The addition of a steel-structure walkway functions as a viewing platform and rainwater collection system, designed to be constructed and dismantled independently of the Chapel, to allow it to be a meanwhile strategy for the site.

The second phase would transform the back part of the Chapel, which used to be a Sunday school, into shared accommodations. This phased strategy facilitates community engagement while encouraging a sense of privacy and ownership for residents.

The final phase, could see the Chapel developed into more residences, as the walkways are demountable.

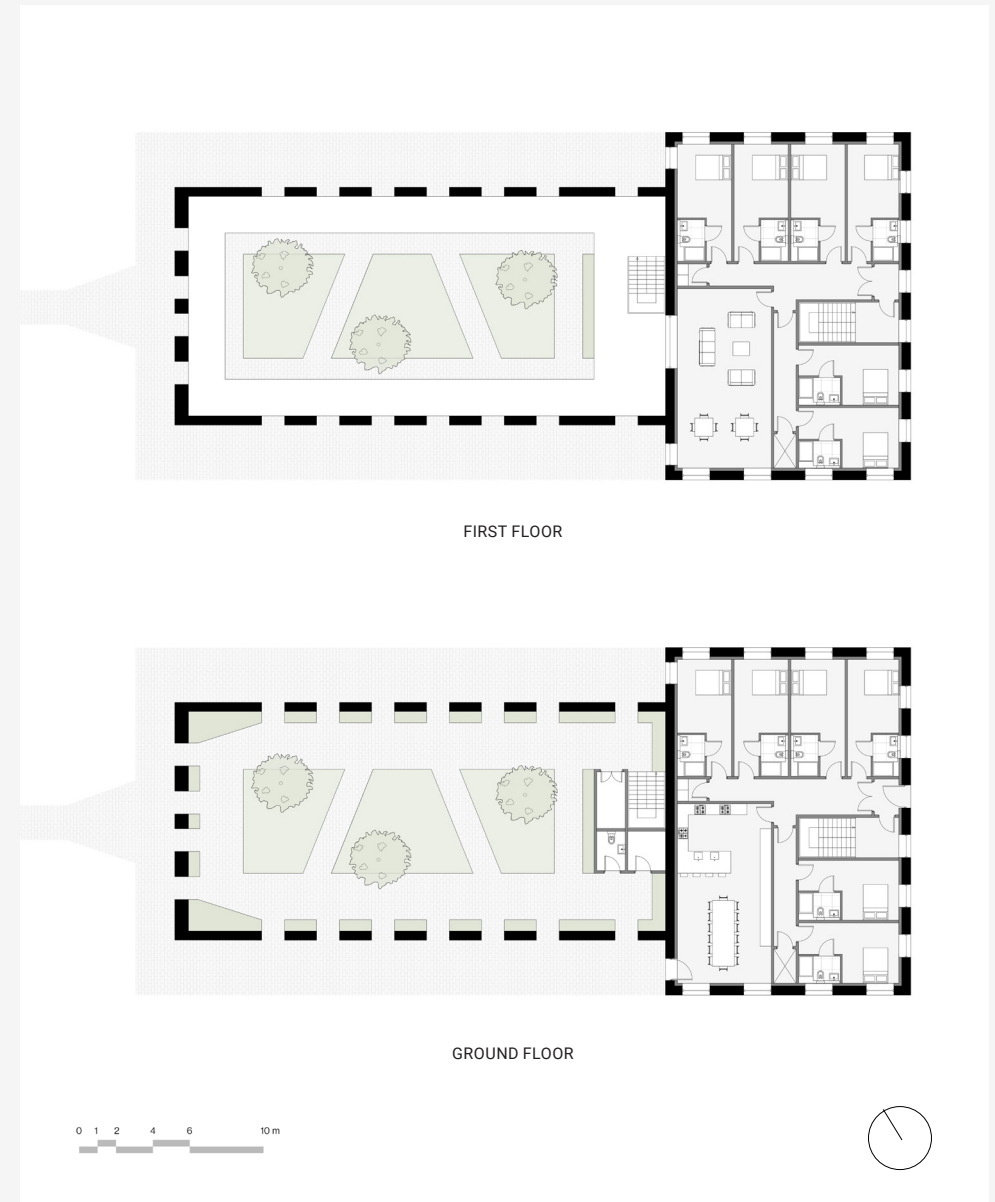
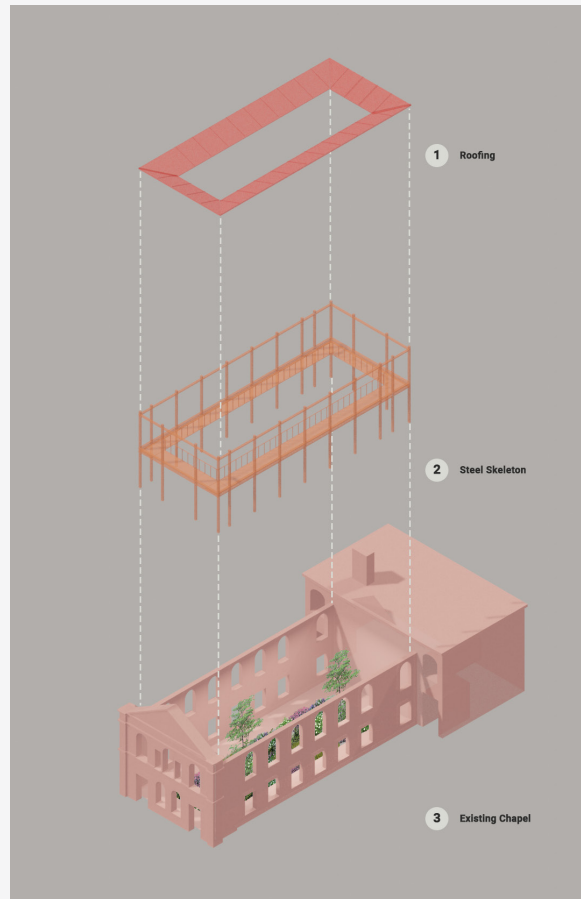


Image Top (Left)
Exploded axonometric showing the demountable steel walkway as a light-touch reactivation of the site

Image Bottom (Left)
Collage illustrating our concept: embracing the ruin and incorporating nature.

Image Above
Final floor plans showing the garden in the chapel (with suitable ancillary spaces), and the transitional accommodation in the Sunday School. Large bedrooms are provided for comfort and privacy, as well as shared kitchen, living, and laundry.

Reflection

Project Evaluation

MSA Live was an opportunity to experience team leadership and develop our delegation skills. We adapted the action plan to organic workflows, splitting work tasks according to peoples' strengths. In this way, MSA Live introduced us to pedagogy, allowing us to give back to those who are at an earlier stage in their architectural education. A modelling team, sketch team, site analysis team and CAD team worked together to produce an RIBA Stage 2 concept presentation for Valley Heritage's visit to MSA on the 23rd May.

We found ourselves extremely impressed by the diligence and competency of the undergraduates. We worked outside as a group, on warm days, to increase our mental stimulation during design development. We used a range of mediums to create entrancing visuals that highlighted the site's potential to give back to the community as a garden, while serving the wider Lancashire area as social housing. We honed the building use and accommodation schedule through physical modelling. The sketch models were particularly useful in the final presentation when Valley Heritage came to MSA on Friday 23rd May. They proved to be a tactile and engaging stimulus for discussion.

We created a unified 'practice' environment by bringing our ideas together into one collective vision: drawing people into an enclosed community garden by sustaining the fascination of the graveyard as a site of heritage value. Manicured lawns and garden lighting will transform the site and its boundaries into a safe environment. A trail throughout the garden will showcase the site's history to restore a sense of site ownership. Temporary shared housing in the Sunday School is an ethical proposal that satisfies Valley Heritage's initial brief. They will accommodate refugee families in need. The retrofitted Sunday School will exceed current regulations and standards using a well-insulated, energy-efficient building envelope, reducing running costs of the building.

We dealt with unexpected challenges as a team in the community engagement event on the 15th May, such as identifying concerns and providing reassurance to anxious or strong-minded contributors. Organising the external event was a collaborative task and relied on consistent back-and-forth communication with Valley Heritage; marketing was a success as the number of participants exceeded expectations. Although we produced an online community engagement form, we struggled to engage them and get community responses. This highlights a flaw in our action plan, suggest that, perhaps, we should have released the forms earlier.

Overall, the final presentation was a brilliant opportunity to showcase what we learnt. The collaborators were surprised with what we achieved in a short time period. and we are keeping in touch with them and excited to see how the project evolves



Image Top (Left)
From the Ground: the ruin of the Waterbarn Chapel is proposed to be embraced as the initial phase, bringing people and nature inside.

Image Bottom (Left)
From the Top: a lightweight and demountable walkway will initially occupy the Chapel, as a cost effective, reactivating solution.

ABOUT

Each year the MSA LIVE programme unites Masters Architecture year 1 and Masters of Architecture & Adaptive Resuse students with those in BA 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 650 students from 5 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

BLOG

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