

MANCHESTER SCHOOL
OF ARCHITECTURE

Agecroft

AN NEW



AGENDA

Agecroft Chapel, a Grade II listed building, sits in the heart of a Cemetery, however it has fallen into need of repair and restoration. Currently, a wooden lantern on top of the building poses the threat of collapse. Through intervention, we hope to create interest on site and interaction with this building in order to raise money for the removal or restoration of the Lantern. This project engage with the immediate community of Salford and those with familial connections to the site. Through light structures facilitating a cafe, children's space and flower garden, we intend to draw business to the Chapel and create engaging ways for the community to interact with our design. We aim to bring a sense of connection between the cemetery and the local community.

SKILLS

Teamworking
Project Management
Graphical illustrations
Digital modeling: Conceptual & BIM

Adaptive Reuse and Retrofit design

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Visit msa.ac.uk for more information



Salford City Council

MSA
LIVE 25

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Partners

Salford City Council is the local government authority for the City of Salford in Greater Manchester, England, United Kingdom, responsible for the local governance and public services in the area. Salford City Council is currently progressing a restoration and adaptive reuse programme for Agecroft Chapel, looking to secure funding from various heritage restoration funds, notably the National Lottery Heritage Fund. To help with their proposals, the council prioritised public consultation at every stage, including our MSA Live project as a segment in their proposal. Public comments are important to ensure the final proposal is appropriately designed to meet Salford's needs and capitalise on opportunities across this Grade-II listed chapel.

Building on past proposals commissioned from other architects, structural engineers and building surveyors, our group ethics will revolve closely with Salford City Council's civil vision and values to ensure our proposals are consistent with prior work done. The most applicable values to this restoration project include empowering community growth, creating places where people want to live and enjoy, a child-friendly city, and healthy lives and quality care for all. This will push the Agecroft Chapel towards the council's mission of building a fairer, greener, healthier and more inclusive Salford for all.

Engaging with public actors will ensure the proposed scheme is inclusive of both current and future users of the chapel, from Agecroft to the wider Salford region. By corresponding with Salford City Council's Community Organisations Database and NPO Salford Community and Voluntary Services, public consultation will extend to a wide variety of community groups across different age ranges, demographics and audiences. We are grateful for the help from local community leaders in spreading our questionnaire to their respective groups, such as: ACRA Agecroft Chapel Restoration Association, Lower Kersal Youth People & Community Group, Kersal Vales Allotments, St Aiden's Church, Mental Marathon, St Sebastian Community Centre, Aspire, and Walk the Plank.

Introduction

Agecroft Anew

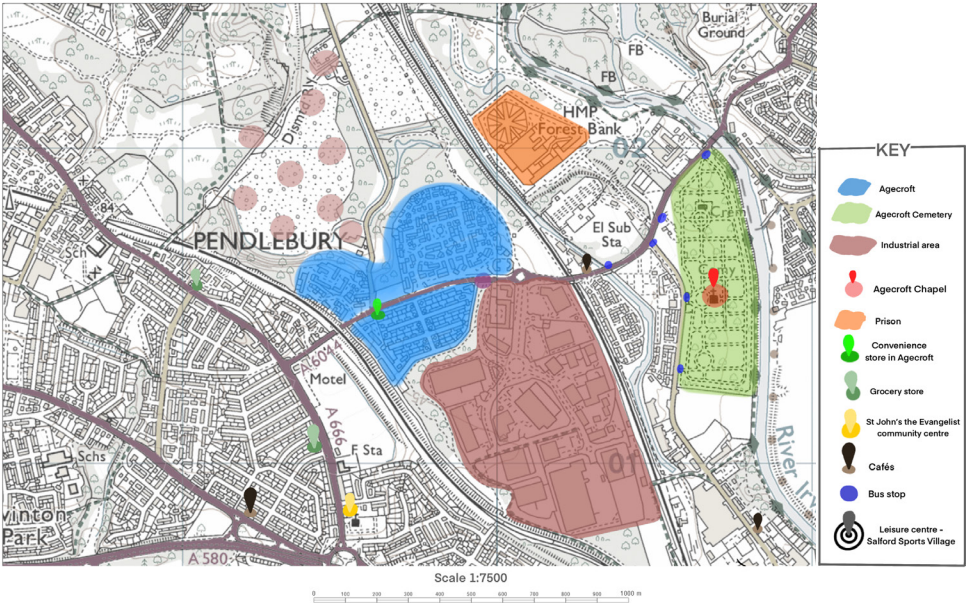
Situated within the historic grounds of Agecroft Cemetery in the heart of Salford, Agecroft Chapel stands as a prominent yet long-neglected landmark. Positioned on a gentle elevation and partially enveloped by ivy, the chapel's distinctive tower rises above the cemetery, visible from its entrance and surrounding streets. Designed in 1903 by Manchester-based architects Sharpe & Foster, the Grade II listed structure represents a rare fusion of Perpendicular Gothic, Arts and Crafts, and Art Nouveau architectural styles. This unique blend is exemplified in the chapel's intricate stained glass windows and finely crafted stone detailing.

Despite its architectural and historical significance, the chapel has stood vacant since the 1980s, now rendered inaccessible due to structural deterioration. Although various feasibility studies and community-driven initiatives have been undertaken over the past two decades, challenges such as costly repairs, restricted access, and the absence of a clearly defined function have hindered its revival. The current renewal initiative aspires to stabilise the chapel, conserve its architectural character, and propose sustainable functions that reintegrate it into the life of the community.

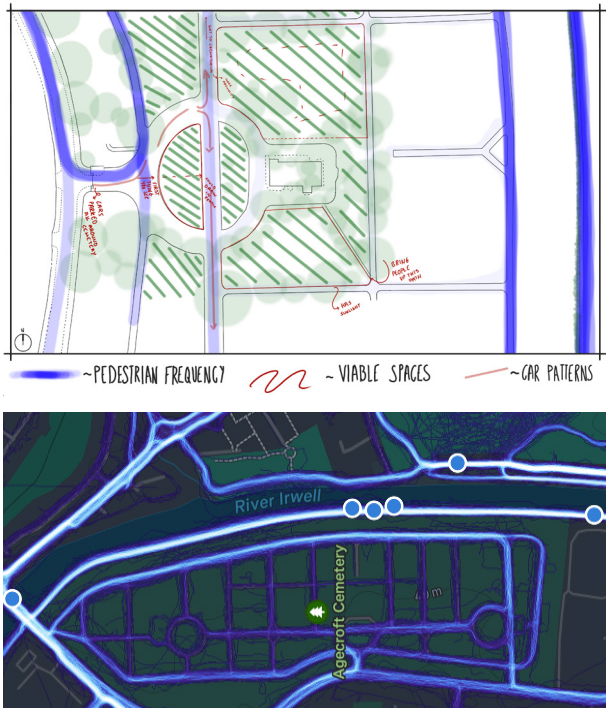
As part of this effort, the MSA Live project introduces a new wave of inquiry and vision. Engaging with local residents through site investigations, surveys, and participatory observations, students of architecture will gather insights into community needs and sentiments. These findings will shape a focused two-week design process aimed at generating informed and imaginative proposals. The initiative ultimately seeks to contribute meaningful design interventions that not only address the chapel's challenges but also encourage active public involvement in shaping its future.



Site Analysis



Through the site analysis we sought to understand how Agecroft Cemetery is used by visitors. We collected primary data and utilised Strava heatmap data to identify key access points and circulation routes. Engagement with the local community and Salford City Council revealed a need for improved wayfinding, more seating, and accessible information about the chapel. These findings were supported by a questionnaire shared with local resident groups. Our analysis considered the client's objectives, various site users and their modes of transport, and the roles of co-professionals involved in the project. This data-informed approach establishes a strong foundation for thoughtful and responsive design interventions.



SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

Pleasant site ambience with natural sounds like birds chirping, which enhances visitor experience. Existing seating and a designated community area encourage social interaction.

WEAKNESSES

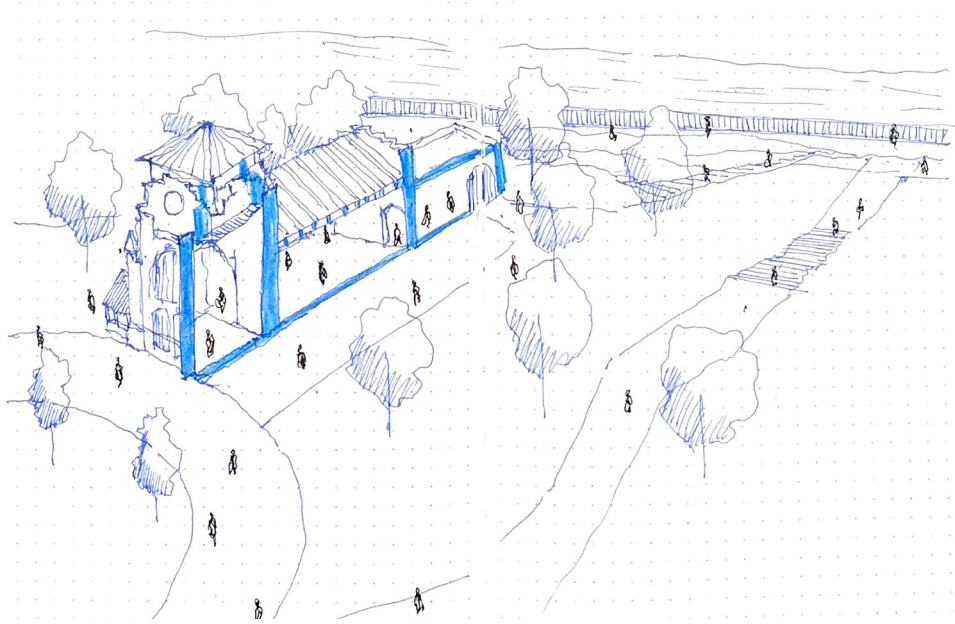
Requires sensitive planning around the memorial area to preserve its sanctity. Events in the new extension must be carefully managed to avoid excessive noise.

OPPORTUNITIES

Potential to enhance the space into a vibrant and functional community hub.

THREATS

Overgrown weeds may pose safety risks and detract from the site's appearance. Steep slopes behind the church present safety hazards that need to be addressed.



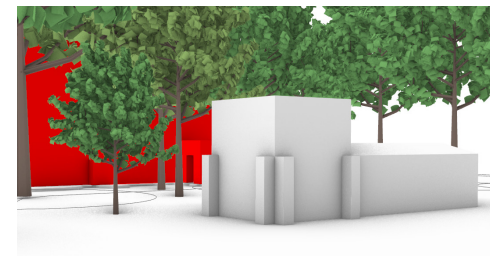
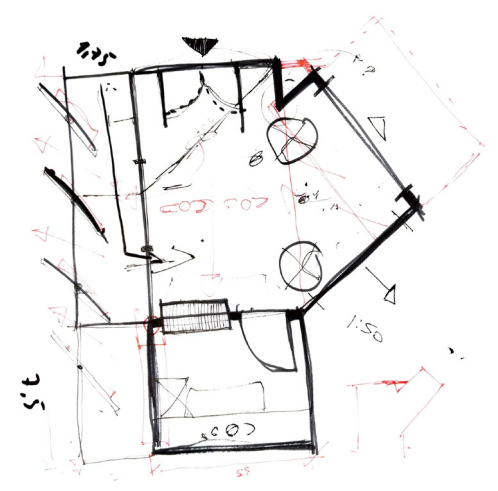
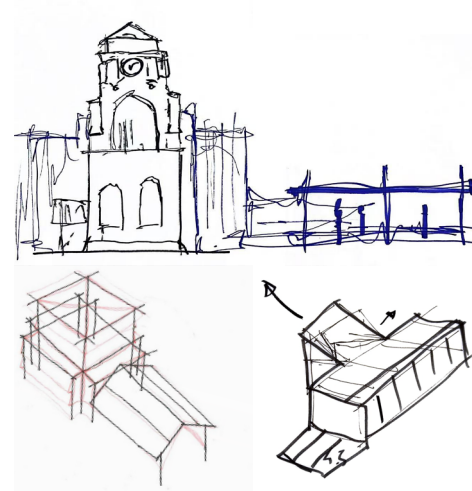
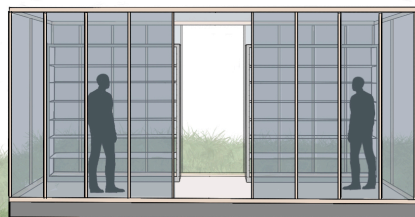
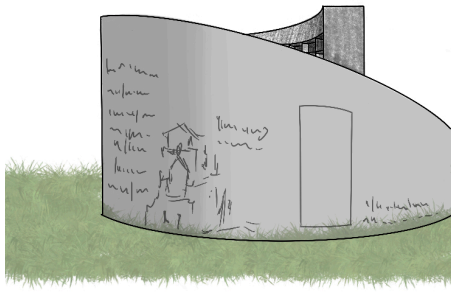
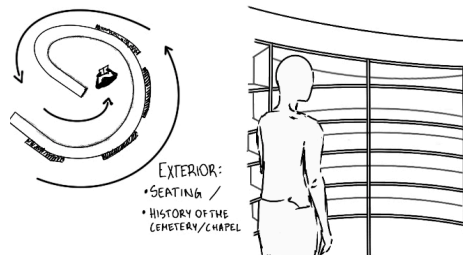
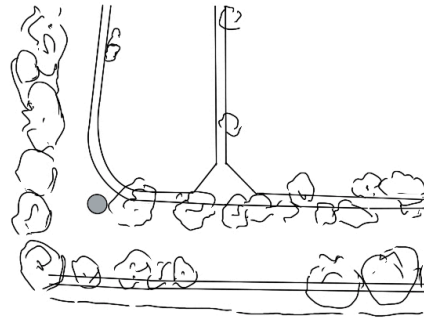
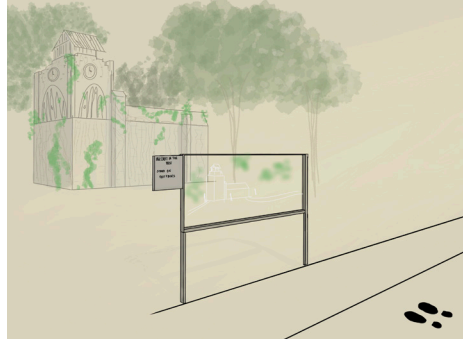
This sketch captures Agecroft Chapel's connection to its contoured landscape, positioned prominently on a natural rise within the cemetery. Surrounding pathways follow the terrain, guiding views toward the chapel. Adjacent to the site, the River Irwell adds ecological richness, reinforcing the chapel's relationship with its historical and environmental context.

Exterior Exploration

The exterior exploration aimed to increase site engagement and refocus attention on the Grade II-listed Agecroft Chapel. To guide this, we explored three levels of engagement to determine which elements the council would consider progressing. The initial phase involved site analysis and sketching to identify suitable locations for a large temporary structure.

We proposed site information boards that used their form to frame and highlight the chapel, drawing visual attention to the monument. Additionally, we explored the idea of enhancing community involvement through smaller installations dispersed across the cemetery. These included an object-swapping structure where visitors could donate items in memory of loved ones, a rainwater collection feature for grave maintenance, and a lantern-like installation projecting patterns inspired by the chapel.

During the mid-project review, the council responded positively to the concept of the information boards and their potential to visually direct focus toward the chapel. However, feedback from both the council and the Bereavement Services manager indicated that the smaller structures were considered too intrusive and unlikely to generate significant engagement. Based on this response, the proposal for the smaller interventions was not pursued further.

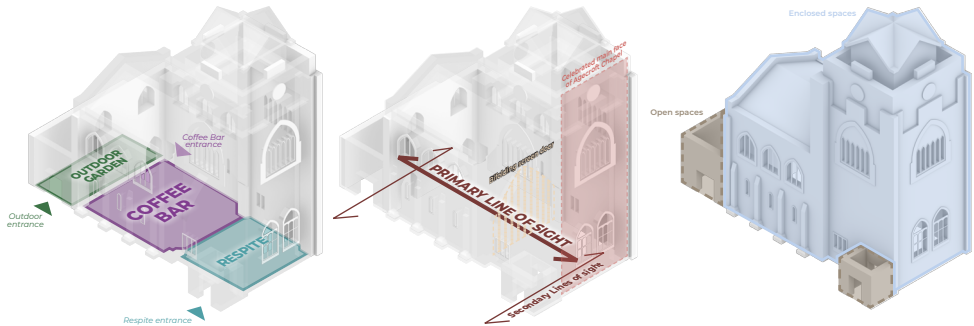
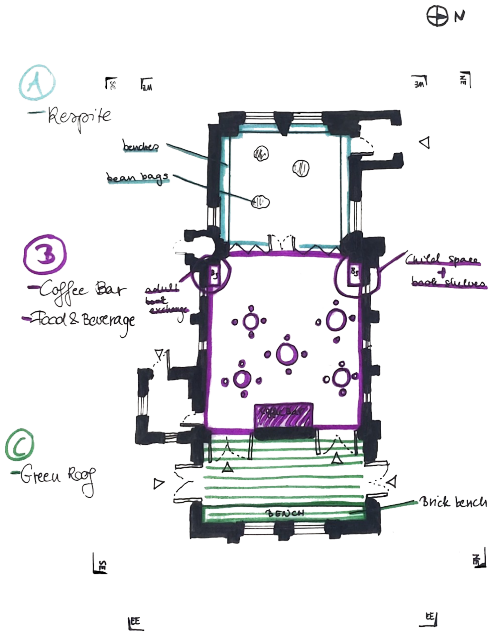


Concurrently, before the mid-project review, we were working on our largest intervention as well and deciding on its function and relationship to the church. Sketching and precedent study were an essential part of this process, alongside massing. This work was presented at the mid-project and there was concerns of the temporary structure due to it's open nature was a risk for anti-social behaviour. The council's feedback on the massing, function, and relationship to the chapel was positive.

Interior Exploration

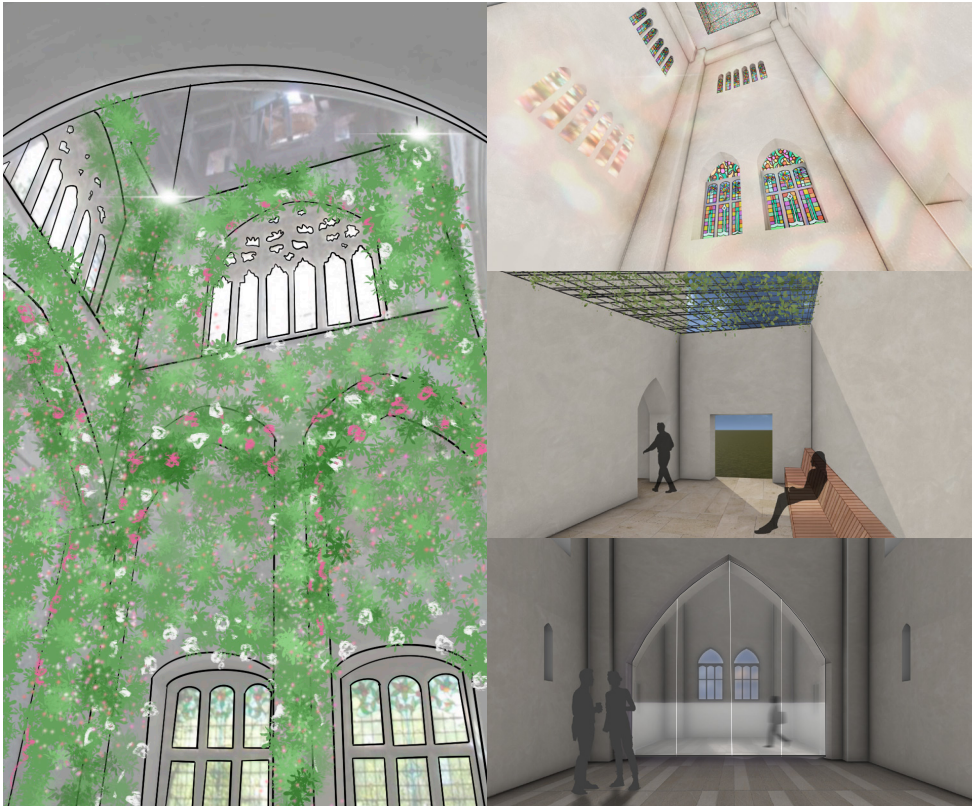
Following the site visit, a comprehensive zoning strategy was developed to better understand the chapel's spatial potential. The building was divided into three key zones: the tower, envisioned as a contemplative respite space offering vertical views and solitude; the central hall, reprogrammed as a vibrant community café to encourage gathering and social interaction; and the overgrown garden at the rear, transformed into a semi-open landscaped courtyard that blurs the boundary between built and natural environments.

Each zone was carefully studied through a series of exploratory sketches and iterative design exercises, allowing us to refine spatial layouts, assess user flows, and propose contextually appropriate materials and interventions that reinforce the character and purpose of each space.



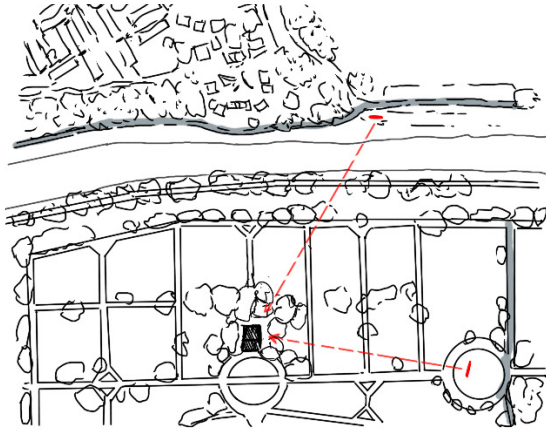
Three diagrams were created to illustrate each internal programme's spatial proportions, user circulation, and cost-saving enclosures. These visuals were shared with Salford City Council to communicate our design intentions clearly. They demonstrate how the chapel's spaces can be adapted to meet the council's goals of creating a profitable and engaging reuse.

The renders below were produced at the end of week one to gather feedback on our proposed interventions and strategies. This input was used to refine the council's requirements and guide the next stage of development. The resulting adjustments sensitively enhance the chapel's interiors while echoing its original character.



Final Exterior Outputs

Plan locating the Information Board



Moving into the second week we developed the information boards and incorporated the feedback we received from the public questionnaire to include wayfinding to the Chapel within the information boards. We included information boards within and adjacent to the site to increase wayfinding and exposure of the church to the community. The colour is chosen to reflect Salford City Council.

Elevation of the Information Board

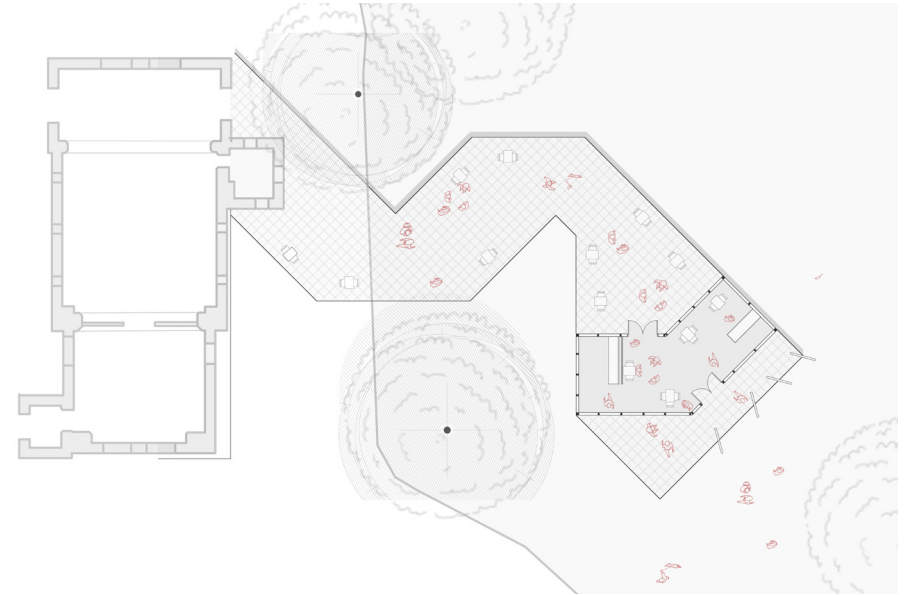


Elevation of the Proposed Extension



For the temporary structure, the materiality changed. We considered the responses from the public to make a more enclosed space for rest, while presenting current information and history about the Cemetery. The movable louvers present this information while the form of the structure opens up to the church.

Plan locating the Extension



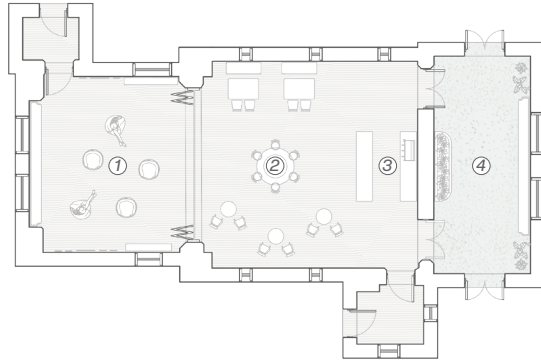
Render of the Extension



The plan extends towards the church so the council can have the option of connection or not, as the structure works with or without the walkway. The construction of the structure is cheap and temporary, while being an enclosed space, which should reduce the council's concerns around anti-social behaviour.

Final Interior Outputs

Plan



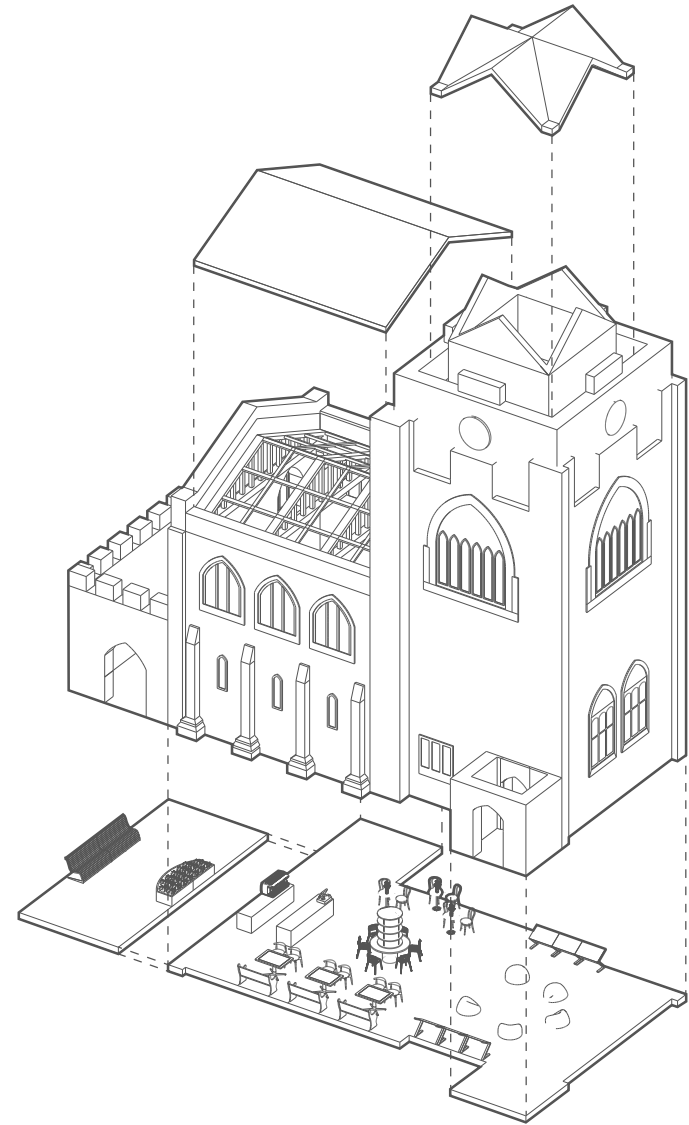
- 1. Tower of Respite
- 2. Book Exchange
- 3. Coffee Bar
- 4. Garden

Section



The final plan and section combines stakeholders' feedback across Salford City Council, Agecroft Cemetery and resident communities across Agecroft to create an inclusive and profitable long-term scheme. By refining the initial zoning plan to resolve week one's comments, furniture has been added to give a sense of scale and purpose within to convey the potential positive impact of the building on both current and future communities.

Isometric of the Chapel



This isometric view illustrates the refined internal zoning and furniture layout of Agecroft Chapel, developed in response to feedback from Salford City Council. The visualisation highlights how each zone serves a distinct function while contributing to an inclusive and flexible long-term vision. Carefully placed furniture introduces scale, usability, and atmosphere. It demonstrates the chapel's potential to support diverse community activities and reconnect with both present and future users.

Spatial Impressions



Beanbags were placed in the Respite Area to provide users with a comfortable space for reflection and immersion in tranquility. The framed displays on the wall and the adjacent display case provided an exhibition space, commemorating the local history of Agecroft.



Our aim when designing the Café Space was to create a vibrant atmosphere. By playing with the natural light through the use of stained-glass windows and a glass folding door which divides Respite and the Café area. In the center we placed a round table with a book exchange function which could further increase engagement.



To reconnect the chapel with its surroundings, an external garden with seating encourages rest and interaction within the natural setting. Wall-mounted lighting enhances safety and deters anti-social behaviour. The design reuses part of the existing structure to create a semi-open sit-out space for community use. A wire mesh is installed beneath the roof to support a hanging garden, blending architecture with greenery and reinforcing the chapel's transformation into a welcoming, contemplative, and ecologically integrated public space..

Final Discussion and Conclusion



The final review with the Salford City Council, Agecroft Cemetery representatives and independent charity organisations shed light on the project's next steps after our handover, the most notable points being:

- Secure by design: Our recommendations of new secure lines, external lighting and passive secure by design features were praised for the minimal interventions added to the Chapel's existing facilities management plan.
- Primary data collection: The questionnaire provided valuable insight to justify our interventions, and the council would like to see further data collected. Our role as architects extends to initiating the medium that connects locals with the Salford City Council to marry political agendas and local sentiment.

Such measures will help create a smooth transition for the future of this project.

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:

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BLOG

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