

**MANCHESTER SCHOOL
OF ARCHITECTURE**

BRING LIFE TO LEISURE: Designing Active & Social Outdoor Spaces

VERDE VISION

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lifeleisure
LIVE WELL, LIVE LIFE.

**MSA
LIVE 25**

Team

Hoi Ting Chloe Tam (MArch1)

Hannah Donaldson (MArch1)

Jacqueline Moya Ndiaye (MArch1)

Jovan Levi Tanael (MArch1)

Chung May Yip (MA AR)

Jovan Levi Tanael (MA AR)

Claire Mbirhe (BA1)

Ian Yi En Chin (BA1)

Mandisa-Iman Thompson (BA1)

Woody Redshaw (BA1)

Yasmin Tarbah (BA1)

Emin Huseynbayov (BA2)

Khadijah Farooqi (BA2)

Reem Sami L Afandi (BA2)

Tong Li (BA2)

Yuxuan Chen (MLA1)

Partners

Verde Vision worked in collaboration with Life Leisure, a not-for-profit company (CIC) owned by the Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council. Established in 2002, their aim is to help promote a healthier and more active community by providing affordable services and amenities. Their centres provide an opportunity for people of all ages to socialise, exercise and build healthier lifestyle habits.

Life Leisure has facilities across Stockport. These include gyms, swimming pools and sports halls. They are active within the community, putting people's health and wellbeing first. By offering affordable exercise and swimming classes, along with accessible facilities for schools and the local community, they can support the physical and mental well-being of Stockport's residents. They run classes such as yoga, spin, HIIT and more, for group fitness, which help people to encourage each other with their shared fitness goals.

However, the current focus is confined to the gym's interior. Life Leisure aims to broaden its scope by extending its attention to the surrounding landscaping.

Introduction

The entrance space at Life Leisure Cheadle is currently uninviting and the greenspaces to the rear of Life Leisure Romiley are underused, offering little beyond their basic function. This project sets out to transform these overlooked spaces into inclusive, functional, and welcoming environments. From the start, the design process was rooted in collaboration, shaped through co-creation and ongoing dialogue with Life Leisure partners, Ross and Lisa, as well as the communities who use these spaces.

We began by engaging gym users directly, ensuring proposals responded to real, everyday needs. An urban acupuncture workshop using a map of Stockport helped identify patterns of activity and deprivation, informing key questions ahead of our site visits. On site, we carried out detailed analysis and invited further community input through interactive physical models, encouraging users to suggest their own ideas. Our approach focused on small scale, strategic interventions with the potential to create wider impact.

Throughout the project, we drew inspiration from the work of Studio Polpo, Playground Design Studio, and Architecture Unknown, whose low-cost, community-led methods showed how design can respond meaningfully to local context.

The outcomes are presented as a package of plans, sections, and visualisations, intended as a starting point for future development. This resource offers Life Leisure a practical tool to engage stakeholders, inspire ideas, and support funding applications. While speculative, the proposals were designed for adaptability. Ross emphasised the value of realistic, phased interventions. Embracing funding limitations as a creative challenge, we proposed modest, accessible changes that foster social interaction, strengthen site identity, and support year-round use.

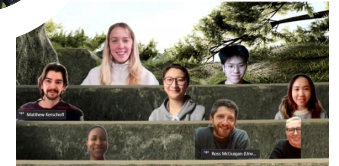


MEETING THE COLLABORATORS 04.12.24

Discuss Brief and Outcomes

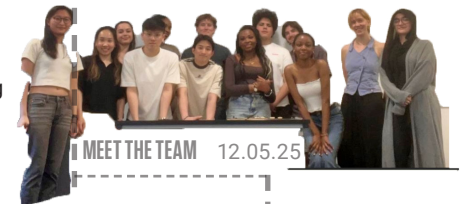
ST SITE VISIT 05.02.25

Identifying areas for site development



CHECK IN WITH COLLABORATORS 12.03.25

To relay Action Plan, Risk Assessment and Ethics



MEET THE TEAM 12.05.25

SITE ANALYSIS 12.03.25



MODEL MAKING 13.03.25

URBAN ACUPUNCTURE

14.03.25



COMMUNITY

ENGAGEMENT

14.03.25

COLLABORATOR MEETING

15.03.25

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

19.03.25 - 22.03.25



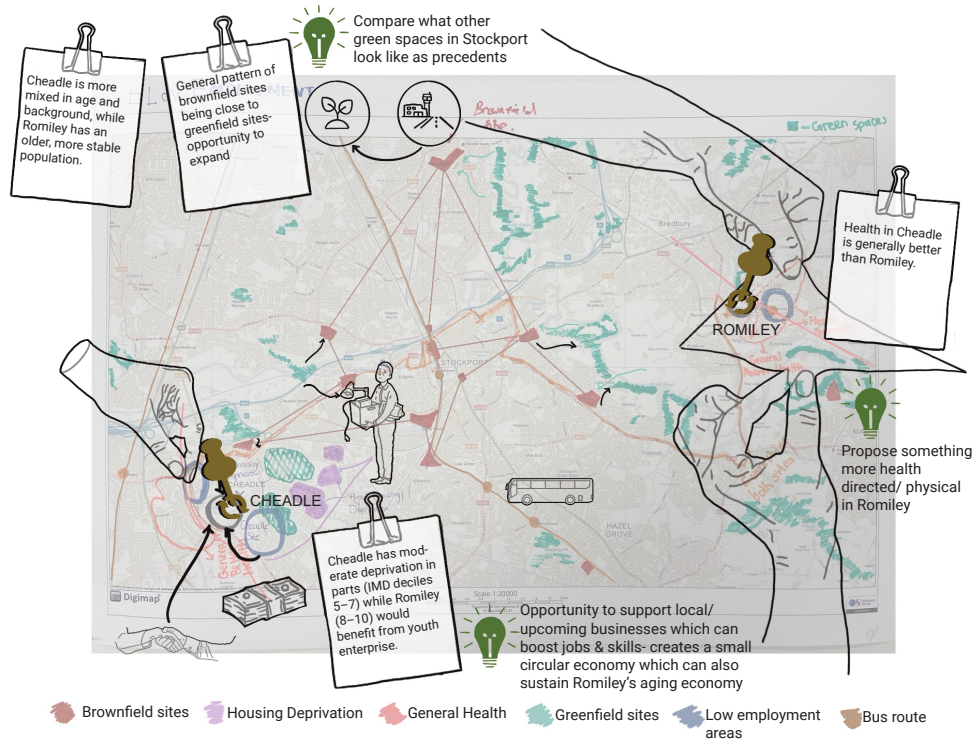
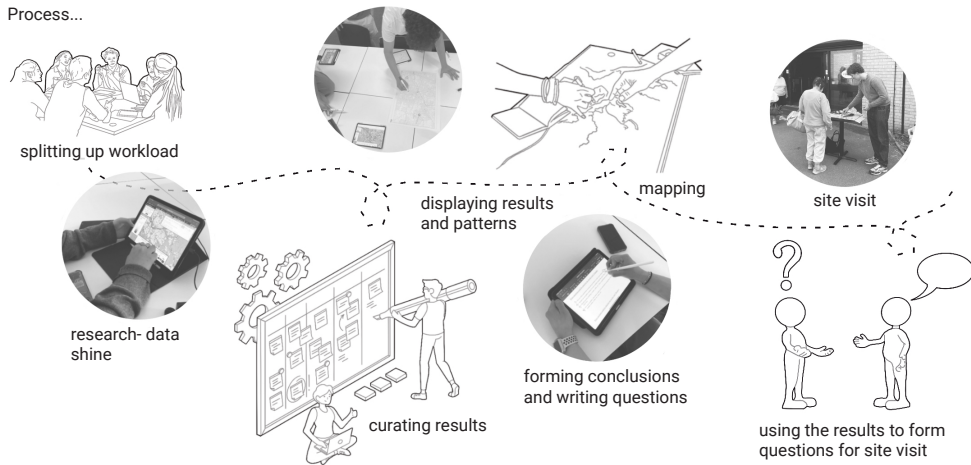
FINAL PRESENTATION

22.03.25



Urban Acupuncture

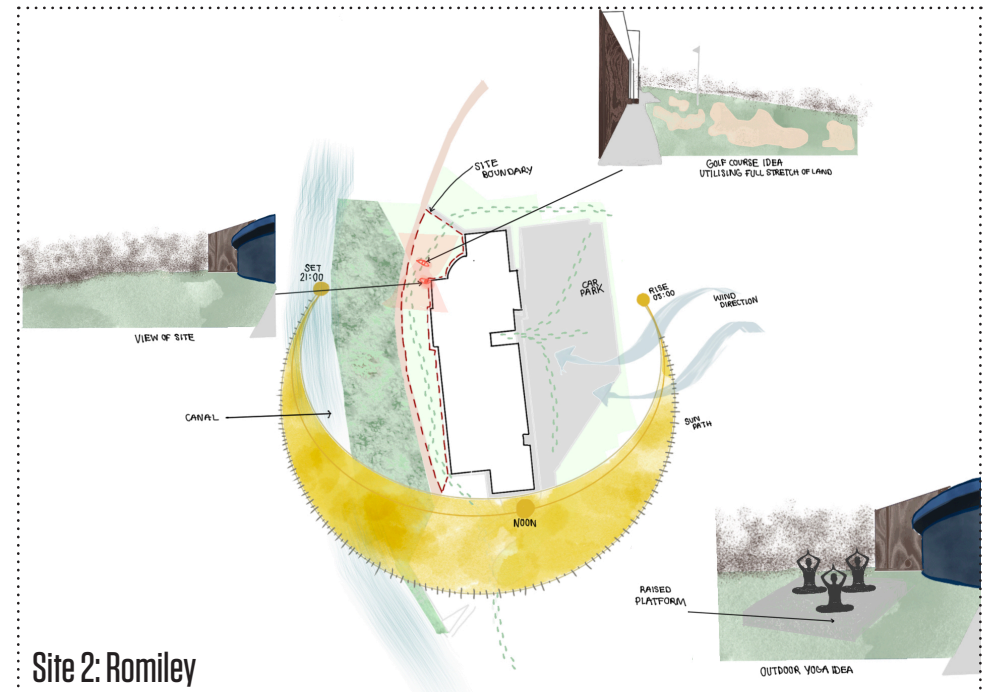
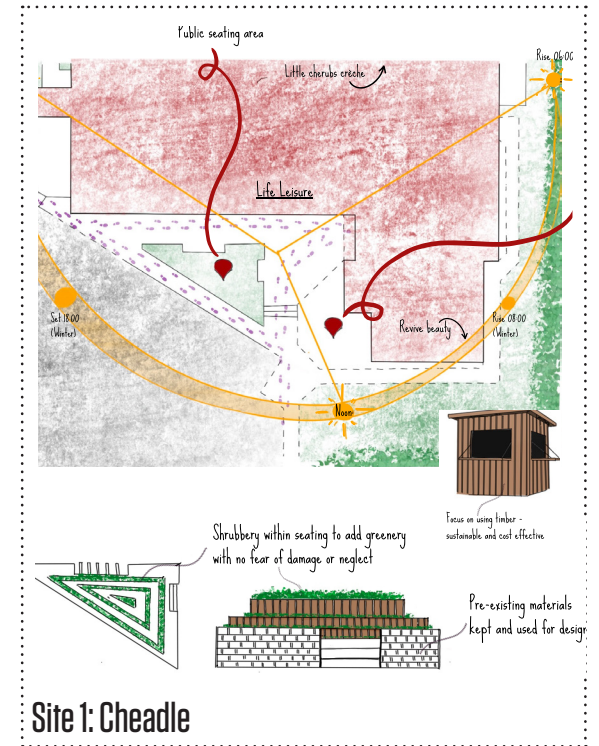
Process...



SITE ANALYSIS

Drawing on Jaime Lerner's theory of urban acupuncture, we used desktop research to study demographics, deprivation, and local activity, helping us identify key patterns and shape site visit questions focused on lived experience.

To ground our ideas in community engagement, we carried out site analysis and sketched early interventions not as final proposals, but as prompts for dialogue. Our goal was to engage residents in co-creating solutions, aligned with participatory design principles, showing how small actions can spark broader, community-led change.



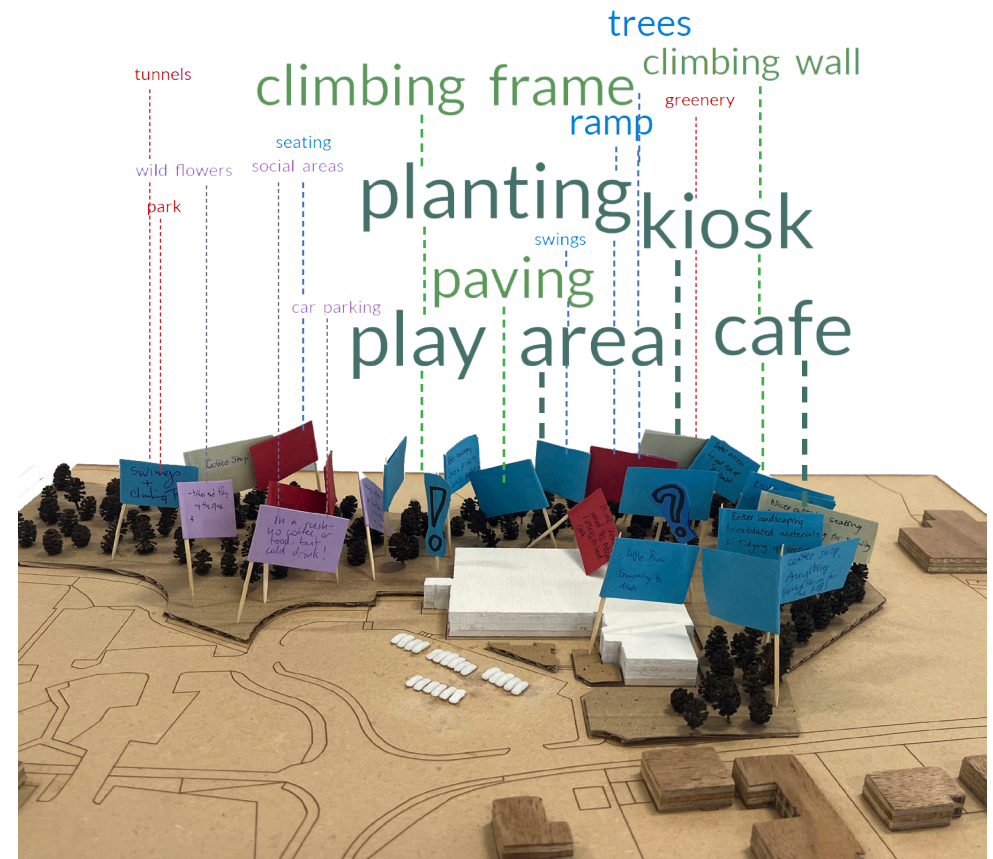
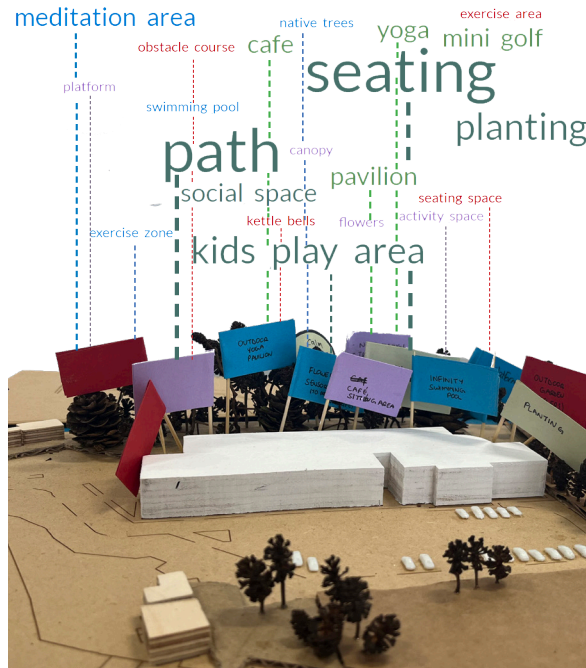
Engaging with the Community

As mentioned, by adopting strategies inspired by community engagement led by studios like Studio Poplo and Architecture Unknown.

Through mapping workshops, questionnaires, and informal conversations, we engaged local users in shaping the design. Feedback from diverse participants, such as a groundsman's advice on low-maintenance planting and parents' ideas for child-friendly play areas, was invaluable. Early input from our collaborators, Ross and Lisa, emphasised the need for better use of green spaces, which guided our initial brief. The positive reception of these ideas confirmed that we were on the right track with revitalising the spaces.

Community members shared a wide range of suggestions, as shown in the word clouds. At Romiley, ideas ranged from infinity swimming pools to planting wildflowers. However, common themes emerged, including improving accessibility to handle muddy conditions and creating more areas for seating, socialising, and outdoor exercise.

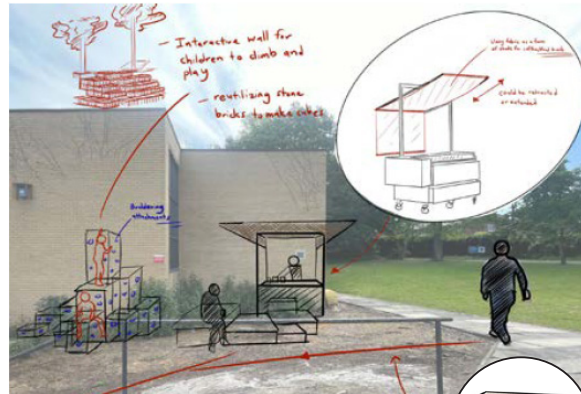
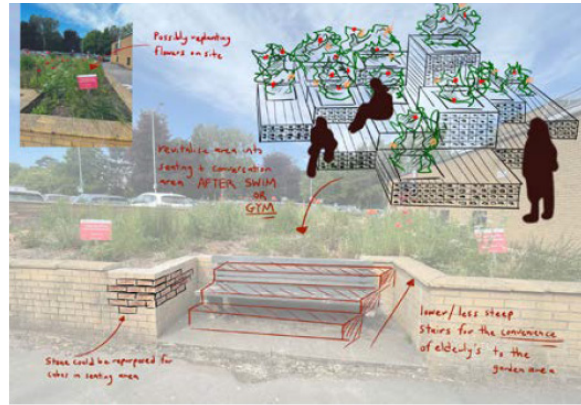
Ethical considerations were a key focus, and we created ethics documentation, including participant information and consent forms. Before the workshops, all team members were briefed on our ethical responsibilities. Participants were fully informed about the consent process in line with University policy, with opportunities to ask questions.



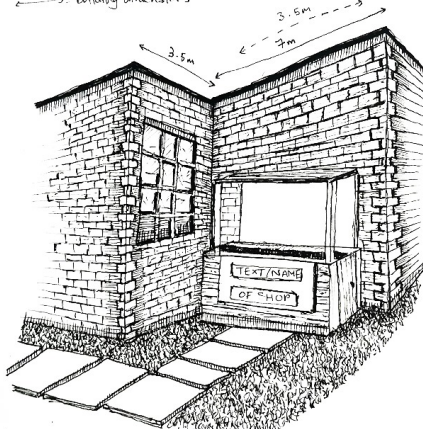
Design Development

Site 1: Cheadle

We refined our initial design to incorporate the ideas of those we interacted with during the site visit. These included seating spaces, play areas, kiosk and replanting of poppies and wildflowers sourced from the site. The design incorporates prefabricated CLT/ timber structure and reclaimed bricks. The kiosk allows for the opportunity for collaboration with Stockport's independent coffee companies, such as Coffee Bean Dream and Kafeine Coffee Van.



--- wrapped brick size
--- building dimensions

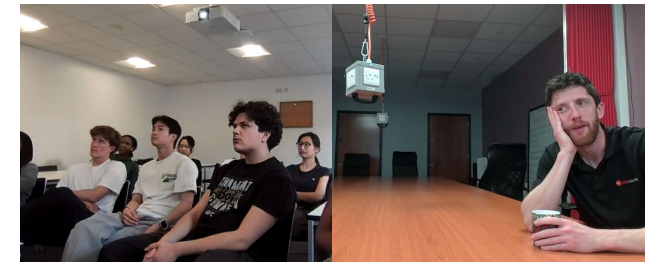
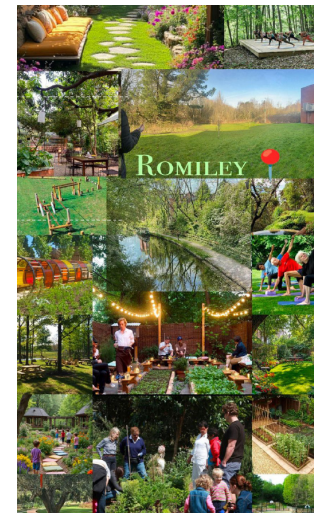


Site 2: Romiley

We proposed a combined scheme featuring both social and active spaces which would appeal to both Life Leisure members and passers-by. The design includes a deconstructed pavilion following a path to create spaces to rest and socialise. The path leads to an exercise platform situated outside the gym which can open up as needed.

Collaborators Meeting

We had a very positive and encouraging meeting with our collaborators where we shared our findings from our research, and the community's ideas for each site. The undergraduate students presented a series of precedents and inspiration photos which prompted conversation surrounding the next design stage.

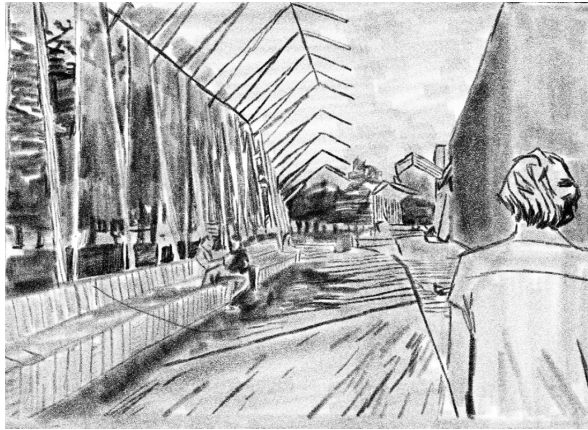


Final Design

The final design stage focused on producing a coherent and realistic vision for both sites. It was essential to move from concept to clarity, ensuring the interventions were both visually compelling and practically grounded. For Cheadle, the emphasis was placed on hand-drawn visuals, in response to the strengths of the undergraduate students involved. Romiley was explored through digital media, using Rhino and Lumion to generate atmospheric renders that captured scale and use. This process became a collaborative teaching opportunity, with master's students guiding undergraduate peers on rendering techniques and skills to enhance visual clarity.

Materiality and construction were addressed with a critical focus on feasibility. Timber and other repurposed materials on site, particularly the greenery and existing brickwork, were explored as sustainable options that aligned with site conditions and budget constraints.

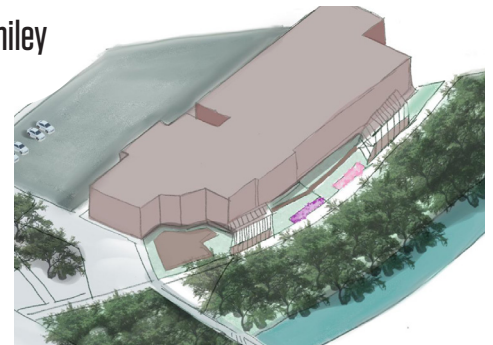
Rather than finalised architectural schemes, the outputs served as a grounded and flexible starting point, offering resolution to communicate intent, while remaining adaptable to future development and stakeholder input. The designs struck a necessary balance between vision and viability, framing clear, actionable ideas.



Site 1:
Cheadle



Site 2:
Romiley



Final Presentation

Meeting at the Headquarters

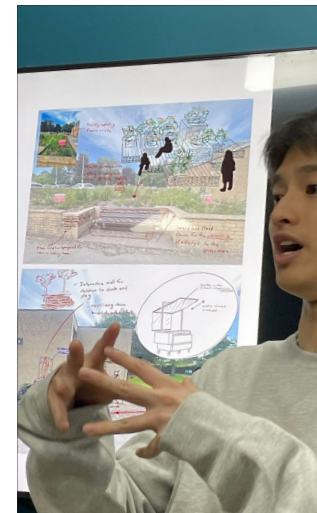
The final presentation marked both the conclusion of the project and the beginning of broader conversations about its future impact. Hosted at Life Leisure Houldsworth Village, the session brought together Life Leisure staff and local council representatives. The undergraduate students delivered a clear and well-structured presentation, outlining the journey from early research to general arrangement drawings and final proposals.

A mixed-media strategy underpinned the presentation. The variety allowed each site's unique character to be communicated effectively, while accommodating different student strengths. Practical strategies were also presented, including potential partnerships and cost-effective material sourcing. Notably, the inclusion of a local coffee vendor - Coffee Bean Dream - was appreciated by Lisa who partnered with them previously. This moment was particularly rewarding and underscored the real-world relevance of their investigations.

Feedback was positive, with collaborators highlighting the clarity of communication and the usefulness of the visuals in imagining the proposals' potential. More significantly, the presentation facilitated constructive dialogue about implementation and next steps. Ross' remark that "it's

important the community of Stockport feels heard" reinforced the impact of the participatory approach. Ultimately, the presentation was not only a platform to showcase outcomes but a critical validation of the process, demonstrating how design-led engagement can inform practical, inclusive, and actionable change.

Following the presentation, the team requested access to the full package of work and expressed an interest in sharing it with additional stakeholders later, to explore how the proposals might be implemented in the future.



Critical Reflection

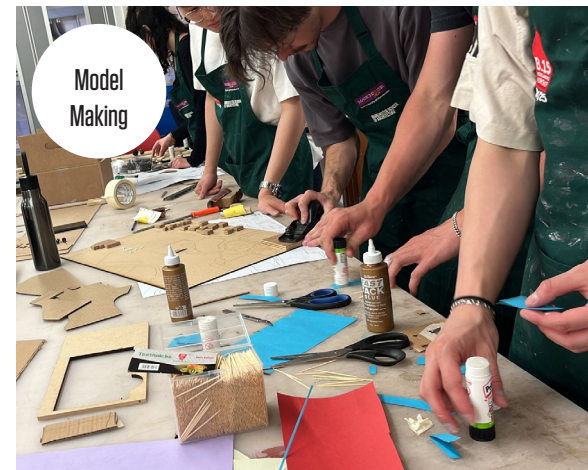
We divided into two groups to address each site. The sites required entirely different interventions, so dividing our efforts from the outset allowed us to focus our attention where it was most needed. This approach also facilitated cross-reviews between groups, ensuring that we could maintain consistency and refine ideas throughout the process. Dividing into smaller, focused teams allowed us to dive deeper into the specifics of each site. Each team member chose their group based on personal interest, which naturally fostered a high level of enthusiasm from the start.

We got to work creating site models, which were not only crucial for our participatory design workshops with the public but also helped us engage more effectively with the undergraduate students involved, providing them with a clearer understanding of our process. This phase of the project was highly successful, with everyone contributing effectively to produce two site models ahead of our site visits. As a result, we were well-prepared for on-site discussions, both in answering questions and in actively questioning the space ourselves, ensuring we remained engaged and informed at every step.

An example of a challenge we encountered onsite was the process of explaining the ethics forms and having participants

sign waivers. Some people were taken aback at first when shown the 2-page document and explained the consent process. However, all participants were happy to sign their waivers and understood that it was a necessary formality. This was a good opportunity for the undergraduates to learn how to communicate with community and clients in a professional way.

Following the initial phase, we curated the results and used them to inform our design proposals. The transition from analysis to design went smoothly, but in retrospect, if time was not an issue, we would have liked to further refine the proposals. The undergraduate students took the lead in developing visual outputs, using various methods such as renders, hand sketches, and collages. This brought a rich range of visual styles that not only made the outputs more engaging but also supported our research findings effectively. However, while the variety was valuable, arguably, it also highlighted a lack of consistency across the presentations, which at times made it difficult to align the design visions cohesively. Despite this, the overall process demonstrated a clear evolution in both our design thinking and our ability to adapt creatively to community feedback. The final outputs reflected a well rounded balance between ideals and practicality.



Feedback

The students that attended regularly throughout the week were really engaged and proactive. Taking initiative when interviewing the members of the public and during the presentation. It was rewarding to see how their designs evolved and were well received by the collaborators and gym members. This initiative was obvious during the cross review in which the students critiqued their peers' work.

The MA and Adaptive Reuse students played a pivotal role in supporting the BA students and coordinating the presentation outputs. Their organisational efforts were crucial to keeping the project on track, especially as the timeline compressed. Despite a few individuals failing to attend consistently, leading to an uneven distribution of workload, the remaining team members rose to the challenge and worked productively. While the dedication of the team was commendable, the absence of certain members revealed areas where our approach to participation and accountability could be strengthened.

Overall, despite these challenges, the team's collective efforts ensured a successful outcome. The outcomes produced will hopefully aid Life Leisure in gaining additional funding for the development of the surrounding landscape.

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

live.msa.ac.uk/2025

SOCIAL

#MSALive25

@msa.live.25

@TheMSArch

@MLA_TheMSArch

WEBSITE

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