

MANCHESTER SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

DIDSBURY

IN UNITY



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**MSA
LIVE 26**

Team

| | |
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Collaborators

Our project focuses on the United Didsbury Methodist Church. Our key collaborators were Dr. Dave Armstrong and the minister, Rev Catherine Hughes.

The United Didsbury Methodist Church was formed in 2023 as a result of the merging of the East Didsbury Methodist Church and the Didsbury Methodist Church. The new church is based at the church building of the former East Didsbury Methodist Church on Parrs Wood Road and the building used by the Didsbury Methodist Church has been sold, forming a budget for the development of the existing building.

The history of Methodism in Didsbury dates to the 1790s, when small Methodist groups gathered in local cottages for worship and community meetings. By the 19th century, the growing congregation established chapels and preaching spaces, reflecting the rapid development of Methodism within the area. Today, United Didsbury Methodist Church continues this long-standing legacy as a welcoming community church, supporting worship, social outreach, and local activities for people of all ages

As part of the MSA Live project, we had the opportunity to collaborate closely with the collaborators as well as a range of user groups from the United Didsbury Methodist Church. Their involvement was fundamental in shaping our understanding of the project brief, the existing condition of the church, and the wider aspirations of the community connected to the space.

Introduction

Didsbury in Unity

Come with us as we reimagine the United Didsbury Methodist Church to strengthen its community presence and enhance its social value through collaboration. Building on ideas and feedback from a series of engagement activities with the collaborators and building user groups, we will create two proposals that transform Room 3, the community entrance, and the end of the main church to create a flexible community hub overall. The proposals aim to encourage wider community use of the building and sustained participation throughout the week in response to the ageing church member demographic.

In response to the findings of our community engagement, the proposals designed include direct street access, creating more inviting site access and thresholds. The redesigned building entrances will be more accessible while remaining secure, creating a space that is inclusive and welcoming to all members of the community, while also providing a safe environment for children and the pre-school. Introducing greater transparency through new openings and visual connections will blur the boundary between the church and the street, allowing public sightlines through to the activities and spaces available within the scheme.

By creating a more expansive entrance and social space, the existing poorly lit and restrictive circulation areas are designed out, allowing this new central space to become a focal point for connection and interaction. At the same time, the church space itself will also be enhanced through the introduction of nearby toilet and refreshment facilities, alongside the creation of a more intimate worship space.

By creating two proposals, we can compare the schemes performance while presenting the collaborator with a broader range of possibilities. As the proposals respond to three distinct church spaces, offering two options also gives the client the flexibility to mix and match elements according to their preferences, budget requirements, and overall project priorities.



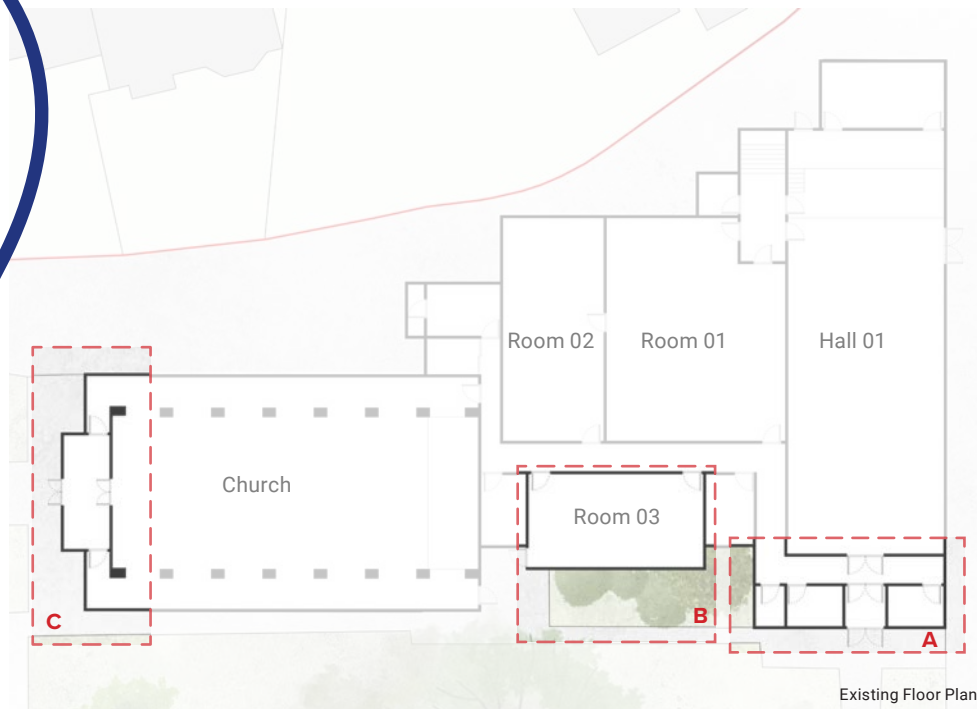
Getting Started

The existing building comprises of a main church hall and worship space on the left-hand side of the plan, while to the right there are a series of function rooms used by a range of groups, including a pre-school, dance classes, and the Didsbury Players. After exploring the brief and initial discussions with the collaborators, it became clear that there were three key areas for development.

Area A: The community entrance to the function rooms is currently inaccessible for wheelchair users due to a stepped entrance. It leads into an awkward, dark, and cramped circulation space with outdated toilet facilities.

Area B: The space known as Room 3 occupies a key position, as it is south-facing and fronts onto the street. However, it is currently underused, with poor transparency limiting natural light into the rest of the building.

Area C: The church entrance currently has solid double doors. The worship space beyond lacks nearby toilet and refreshment facilities. The space is also too large for the current church congregation, who would like a more intimate space.



Collaboration

Site Visit and Initial Presentation

The first stage involved visiting the Church to gain a direct understanding of the building, and its day-to-day functions. Our team delivered a presentation, displaying initial observations, ideas and precedents, which opened discussions about the existing spatial challenges, accessibility concerns, and opportunities within the building.

"Aging church population"

"Improved signage required"

"Lack of security for children"



Community Reviews and Chat :

The second stage focused on engaging with church members and community users to understand their expectations regarding proposed development. Through conversations, discussions, and feedback sessions, we gathered opinions on how different spaces could be improved, what facilities were most needed, and how the church could better support community activities.

"Improved transparency"

"Wider circulation"

"Church entrance facilities"



QR Code and Opinions Box

We displayed our project posters within the church along with QR codes that allowed visitors to submit feedback digitally. Additionally, opinions boxes were provided to encourage participation from less tech-confident users, creating a more inclusive and accessible method of gathering community opinions.

"Social and community space"

"Transparent church entrance"

"Improved toilets needed"



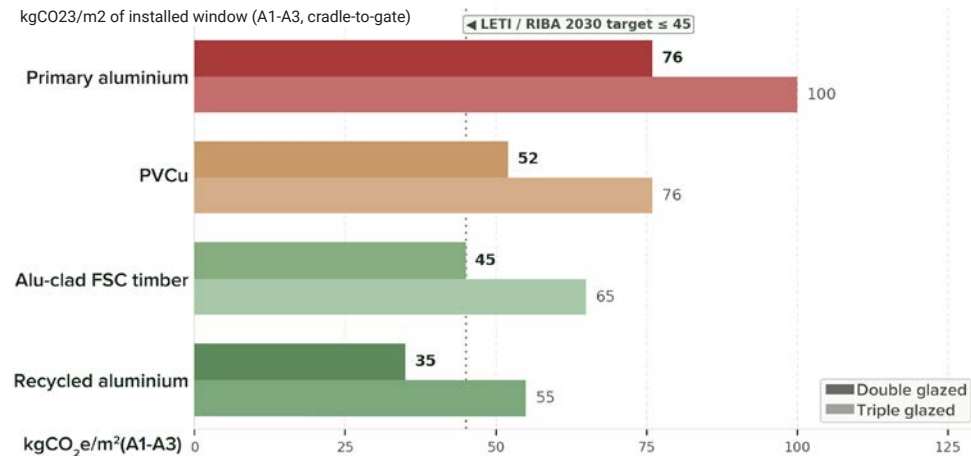
Sustainability Strategies

The Manchester Methodist District is committed to sustainability and aims to achieve net zero emissions across the district by 2030. In response to this ambition, the group developed a series of sustainability strategies guided by research and analysis, focusing on material selection, embodied carbon reduction, and the integration of sustainable technologies such as photovoltaics within the proposals.

Material Assessment

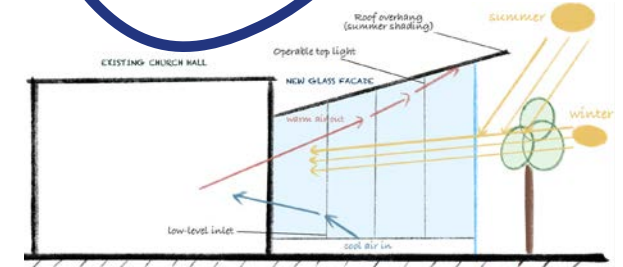
| GLASS | | TIMBER | | ALUMINIUM | |
|-------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|----------|----------------------------|------------|
| Subtype | Rating | Subtype | Rating | Subtype | Rating |
| Single glazing | Non-compliant | Reclaimed timber | A+ | Primary aluminium (global) | C |
| Standard double glazing | B / A | Softwood (FSC) | A+ (WWA) | Primary aluminium (hydro) | B |
| Low-E double glazing | A | Hardwood (FSC) | A+ | Recycled aluminium | A+ |
| Argon-filled Low-E | A / A+ | Glulam (engineered) | A | Powder-coated alu window | A+ (comm.) |
| Triple glazing (Argon) | A+ | CLT (Cross-Laminated) | A | Anodised aluminium | B-A |
| Vacuum glazing | A+ | MDF / Particleboard | B-C | Alu-clad timber window | A+ (WWA) |

EMBODIED CARBON



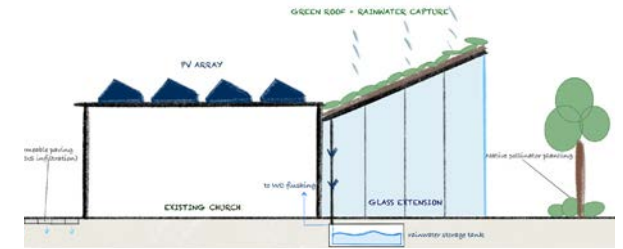
DAYLIGHT + NATURAL VENTILATION

Leveraging the glass facade for passive performance reducing operational lighting and cooling demand. Cool air enters at low-level vents; warm air rises and exits through operable upper light. 3-6 ACH achievable in summer.



STRATEGY WATER + ECOLOGY

Roof as productive surface combining PV generation, rainwater harvesting and biodiverse green roof zones. Permeable block paving replaces hardstanding, attenuating stormwater runoff and recharging groundwater.



SOLAR PANEL INSTALLATION DIAGRAM

The church hall roof provides a large flat surface, oriented approximately 15° west of due south, making it suitable for a solar energy system. Around 80 m² of photovoltaic panels are proposed, alongside an electrical plant room for circuit control and battery storage.

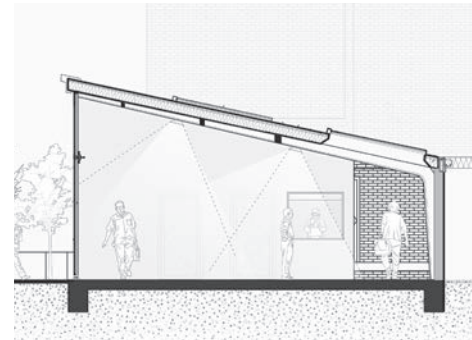
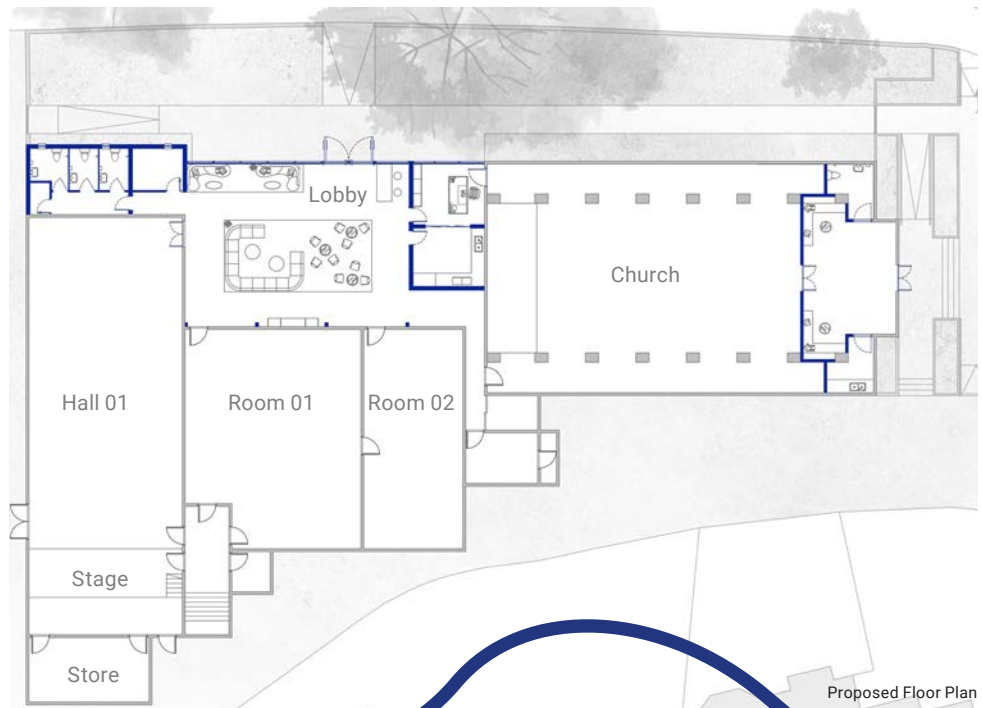


Proposal 1

Design 1 focuses on establishing an atmosphere of openness and transparency through the introduction of a glazed façade intervention within the existing church fabric. Conceived as a deliberate retrofit addition, the façade enhances visual permeability and strengthens the building's presence and visibility within the community. The intervention encloses the lobby space, creating a light-filled transitional threshold between the exterior and interior. Carefully detailed connections allow the new glazed envelope to integrate cohesively with the existing structure, forming a unified architectural system that balances contemporary expression with the retained character of the church.

The design further develops a roofing strategy in which the inclined roof form generates the verticality required to evoke a sense of grandeur and spatial continuity associated with the existing church interior. Conceived as an extension of the church's communal character, the space accommodates gatherings and social activities while maintaining a cohesive architectural language.

The expressive roof geometry enhances the experiential quality of the interior, creating an uplifting and welcoming environment. Timber is employed as the primary structural support system, introducing warmth, tactility, and a sustainable structural approach that complements both the contemporary intervention and the existing ecclesiastical setting.



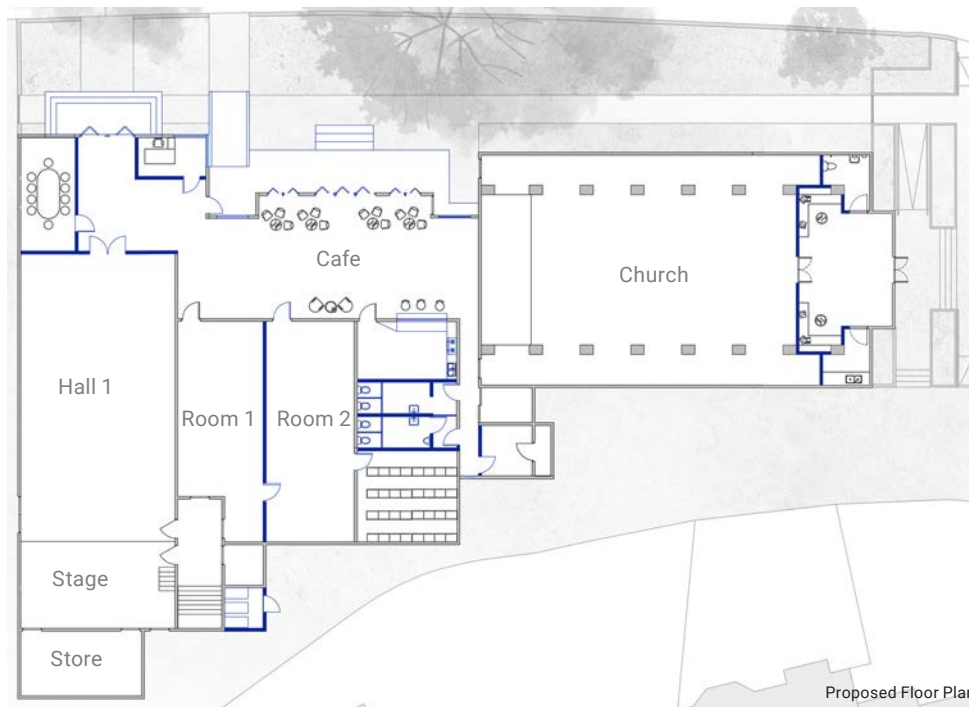
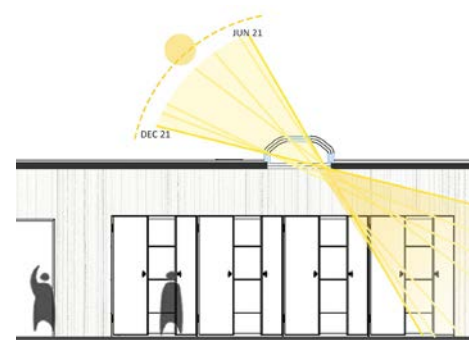
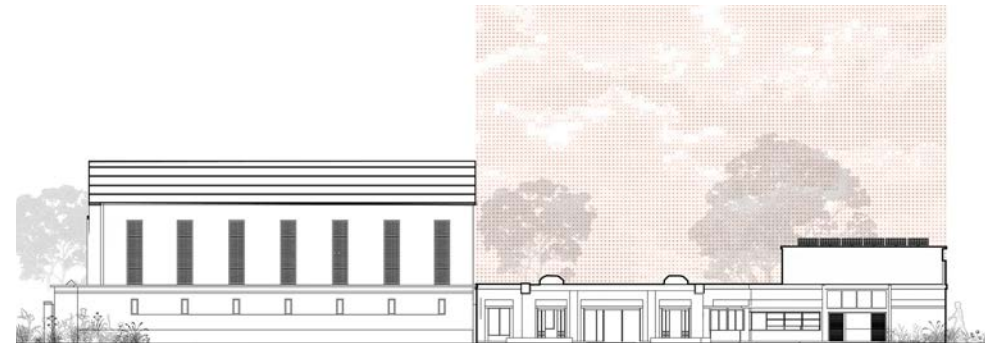
Proposal 2

In terms of the elevation, the south side of the original Room 3 has been reconfigured as one of the new building entrances, with an accessible ramp introduced alongside it. The overall façade language has been modernised, using metal and glass as the primary materials to create a more open and informal atmosphere, closer to that of a bookstore or café.

Architectural extensions such as eaves and platforms have also been added to the façade, reducing the sense of separation created by the previously flat elevation. At the same time, the increased transparency allows passers-by to see activities inside the building, indirectly reinforcing its openness.

Because the original rooms were excessively deep in plan, it was difficult to achieve adequate illumination through natural daylight alone. Therefore, longitudinal rooflights incorporating both top windows and clerestory side windows have been introduced above the original Room 1 and Room 2.

When sunlight is too intense, the top windows can be closed to provide a softer and more diffused daylighting condition. In winter, when the solar altitude is lower, the side windows and top windows can be opened simultaneously to maximise daylight penetration and ensure sufficient natural lighting.



Proposed Floor Plan



Reflection

Reflecting on our collaborative journey as a group, we worked successfully together to produce a large body of outputs for the collaborators, exceeding the work documented within this publication. The outputs are focused on responding to the input of the collaborators and those who participated in our engagement activities. We believe the proposals reflect the care and consideration given to this feedback throughout the design process. This project-focused work was not without many moments of teaching and skill-sharing between members of the group across all levels. We also developed skills beyond those directly associated with architecture, learning how to work effectively as a team, communicate effectively and collaborate cohesively.

We concluded the intensive week with a presentation of our project journey, development, and final outputs to the collaborators. They were pleased with the final proposals, although they raised questions regarding the cost of the schemes. We reassured them that the proposals were intended to test what was possible and that, by providing two proposals addressing three different areas of the design, the collaborators would be able to mix and match strategies, make changes during the next stage of development, and choose which aspects of the design they would like to prioritise. We also plan to present the project to the participants involved in the collaboration event in order to gain further feedback and demonstrate the impact their input has had on the project.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation for the collaborators' continued time, effort, and commitment throughout the project. The opportunity to gain experience working with a real client has been incredibly enriching for us all and is an experience from which we have each developed as architectural designers but also as collaborators.



Polaroids



ABOUT

Each year the MSA LIVE programme unites Masters Architecture year 1, Masters of Architecture & Adaptive Resuse students, BA foundation and year 1 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 students take the lead in the project conception, brief development, delivery and co-ordination of a small project. The projects are celebrated in presentations 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 400 students from 5 cohorts in MSA have worked on 34 projects with partners.

QUESTIONS

For questions about MSA LIVE please contact the MSA LIVE team, Emily & Julie:
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j.fitzpatrick@mmu.ac.uk

BLOG

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