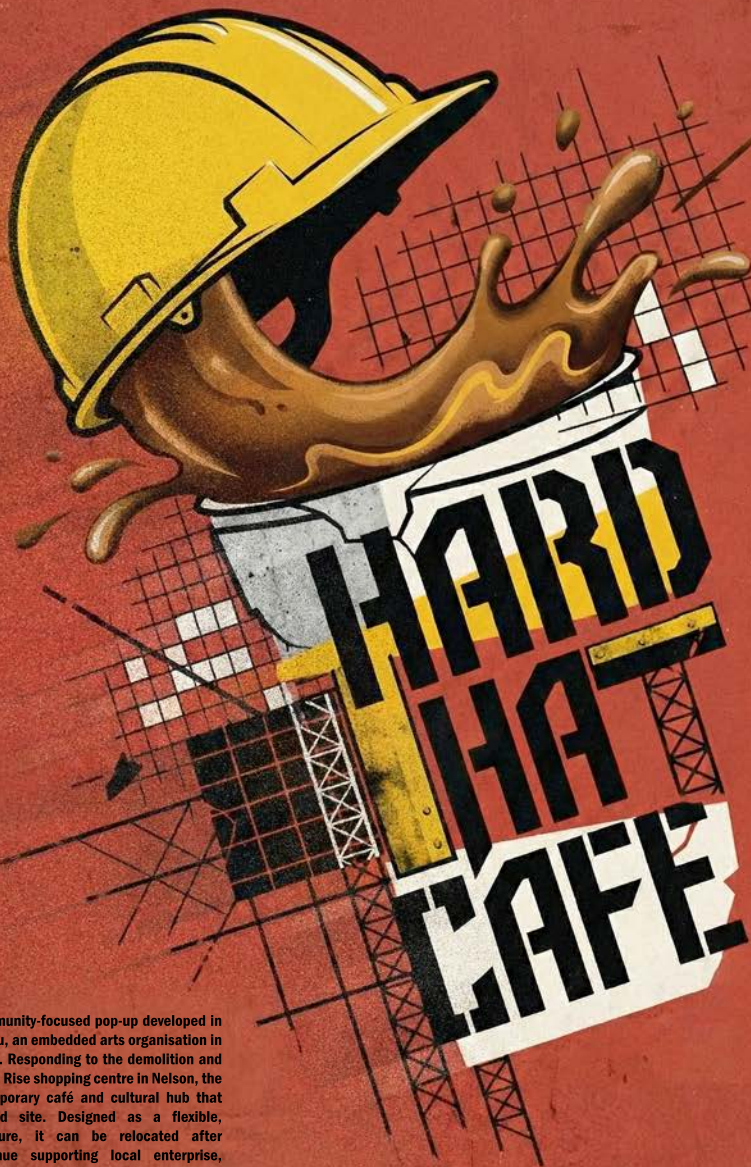


MANCHESTER SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

Samira Junet
Lily-Beth Witt
Kiera Manton
Finlay Johnson
Alika Urmiyeva

Mohammed Rahat
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Hard Hat Cafe is a community-focused pop-up developed in collaboration with In-Situ, an embedded arts organisation in Pendle, East Lancashire. Responding to the demolition and redevelopment of Pendle Rise shopping centre in Nelson, the project proposes a temporary café and cultural hub that activates an underused site. Designed as a flexible, semi-permanent structure, it can be relocated after construction to continue supporting local enterprise, creative activity, and community life in Nelson.

Visit msa.ac.uk for more information



MSA
LIVE 26

Team

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Collaborator

This Is Nelson is a community-focused arts and cultural programme developed by In-Situ, an embedded arts organisation based in Pendle, East Lancashire. The initiative explores how creative practice, collaboration and socially engaged art can help reimagine the future of Nelson from the ground up. Working across public spaces, underused buildings and everyday community settings, the project connects artists, residents, young people and local organisations through long-term creative dialogue and participation. The visual identity and projects associated with This Is Nelson combine contemporary art, architecture, ecology and community storytelling. Rather than focusing only on exhibitions or installations, the programme aims to create meaningful social and environmental change through collective action, experimentation and accessible cultural activity. The work often reflects themes of sustainability, local identity, youth engagement and the reuse of overlooked urban spaces.

Working with In-Situ

Although some circumstances meant we could not meet Michael during the first two months, he still supported the project through video guidance that helped shape our direction. We were fortunate that he was very flexible with our ideas, mainly encouraging us to keep the proposal within budget, work with timber and ensure the structure could be easily transported. Organising feedback and meetings was sometimes difficult due to the group's varied schedules and working styles, but this encouraged us to become more independent and work more closely together as a team.

Introduction

Hard Hat Cafe

Hard Hat Cafe is a community facing pop-up designed to support Nelson's everyday town centre life during the Pendle Rise transition. Working with In-Situ and the wider This Is Nelson aims around creative learning, intercultural exchange and long term local confidence, the proposal builds a small, practical base for everyday social life. Conceived as modular community infrastructure, it supports a quick drink, a casual chat, and a simple programme of pop-up events.

The scheme takes the form of a compact service core that combines cafe and bar functions, paired with an extendable canopy and movable elements that allow the space to shift between day-to-day use and pop-up activity. Rather than a big enclosed room, it works through shelter, openness and flexibility. Panels can open for visibility and ventilation, seating can be rearranged, and the layout can expand or tighten depending on weather and use. The unit is scaled to feel approachable and practical, designed for quick set-up and to be run comfortably by a small team.

Materially, the proposal uses a timber frame for ease of fabrication, repair and reuse, paired with light weight plywood panels to keep the structure bright, robust and economical. Hinged plywood panels act as shutters and signage surfaces, introducing an ornamental language developed from South Asian textile and screen patterns as a subtle nod to Nelson's local culture. Overall, the project keeps budget and mobility in mind, aiming for a modular system that can be relocated and reused beyond the redevelopment period while continuing to support local enterprise and community activity.



Project Timeline

03/02/2026

First Meeting.

Breaking the ice, naming the project "Hard Hat Café," and developing initial poster concepts.

17/02/2026

Creative Mode Brainstorming.

Organising the project through team planning, poster development, and shared design references.

03/03/2026

Can We Swim Without a Fin?

Preparing ethics, timeline, risk assessment, and budget submissions ahead of the deadline.

17/03/2026

Can We Speak Without a Mic?

Refining blog content, reviewing the brief, and preparing questions for Michael.

20/03/2026

Teams Meeting with Michael.

Discussing project expectations, accessibility, recycled materials, and transportable design ideas.

21/04/2026

Speaking with a Mic.

Strengthening the design direction through discussions with Michael and planning future outputs.

Mikes Guidelines

The preferred output is flexible and open to interpretation, combining visuals with at least one detailed site drawing.

The project serves a diverse community of different ages and backgrounds, including White, Pakistani and Eastern European residents, with food as a key focus. The design should be small-scale, adaptable and expandable for rental use, prioritising seating, portable furniture and a lightweight roof. Accessibility is essential, including level access and wheelchair-friendly features. The structure should ideally be mobile, with a £20-25k budget and a focus on timber, recycled materials, sustainability and low-impact design.

Intensive Week

Dedicated week of focused collaboration, production, and design development.

Day 1

Planning and distributing work for the week.

Day 2

Site Visit and Cultural Engagement through Food!

Day 3

More food engagement! Continuation of work and finishing our design.

Day 4

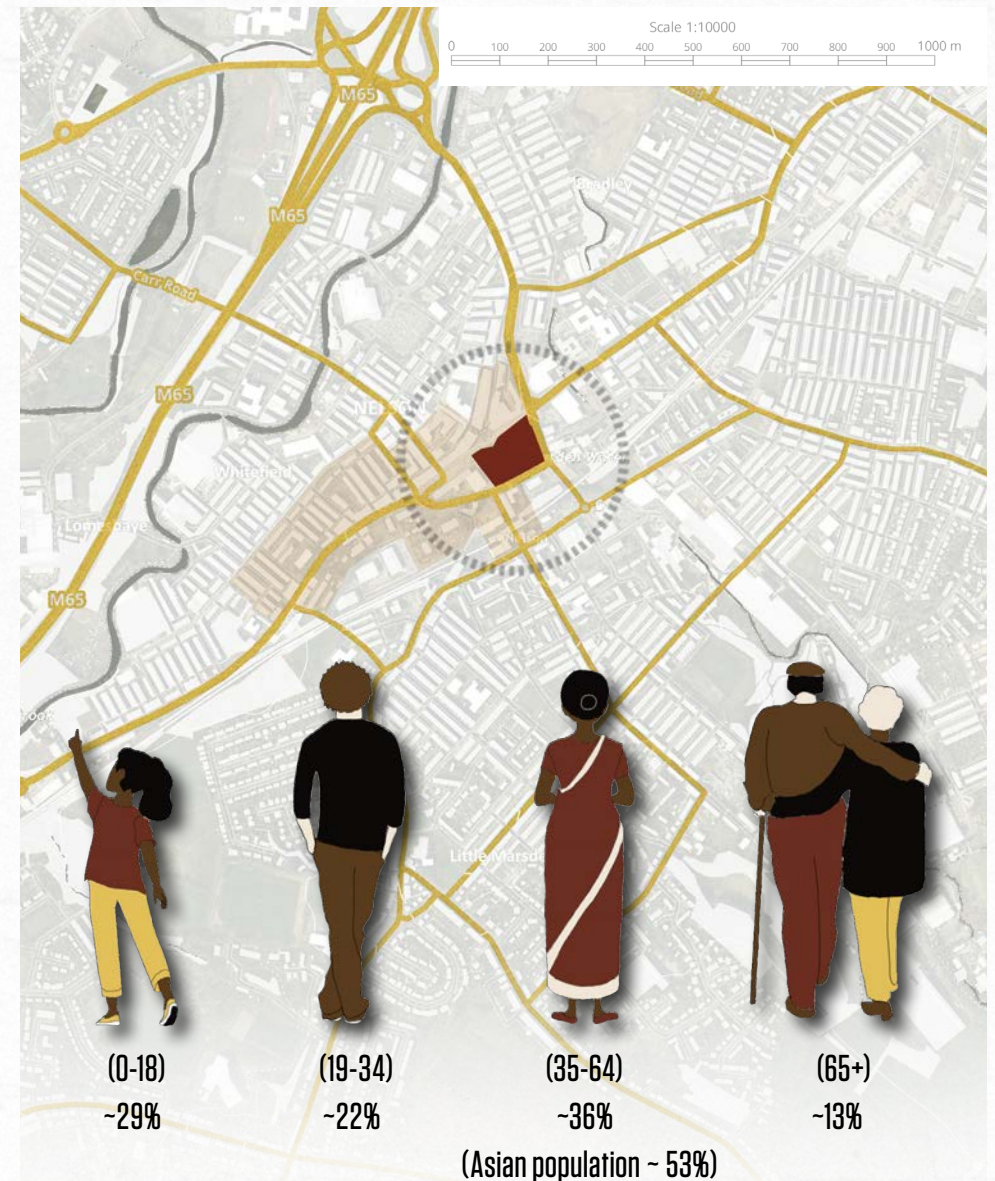
Last iterations, publication and presentation preparation.

Day 5

Show Time!

Site Analysis

Map of Nelson and Demographics



Nelson has a diverse population shaped by its industrial history and generations of migration, creating a mix of cultures, age groups and local identities. A large South Asian community forms an important part of the town, strongly influencing its food, businesses, languages and social life.

Short History

Nelson grew rapidly during the industrial revolution through its textile mills, attracting workers from across Britain and later from South Asia, particularly Pakistan and Bangladesh, during the mid-20th century labour shortages. Today, this migration has shaped Nelson's identity, with strong South Asian communities influencing the town's businesses, culture, food and everyday life.



1840's Textile industry expands into Nelson

1864 Nelson officially recognized as a town, named after the Lord Nelson Inn

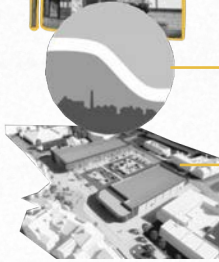
1930's Left wing and anti-war protests give the town the name 'Red Nelson'



1967 Pendle Rise shopping centre opened

1974 Nelson becomes part of Pendle Borough

2024 Pendle Rise purchased by Pendle Borough Council for demolition and redevelopment



Site Visit

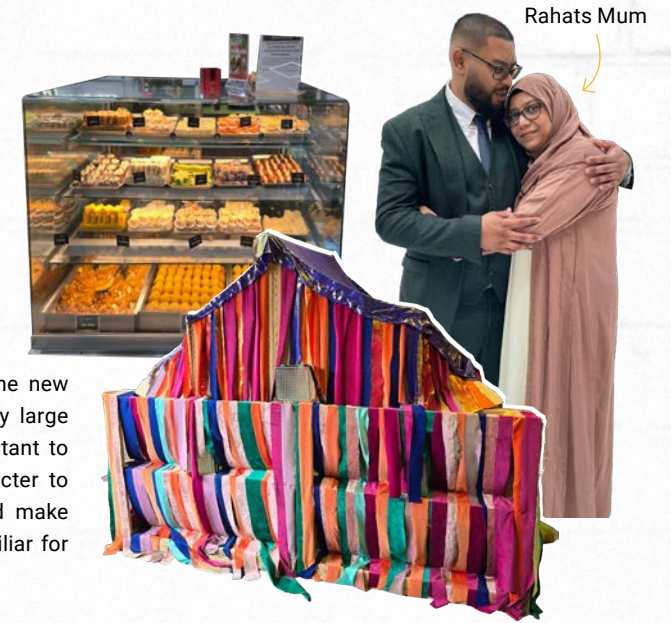
Two of the team visited Nelson to walk the area around Pendle Rise, met Saj from 3B Systems and gain a better understanding of the town centre beyond maps. Observing local businesses, street life and the strong presence of South Asian shops, signage and products helped us think more carefully about how the proposal could support independent enterprise and respond to the existing character and demographics of the area.



The fencing around the Pendle Rise Shopping Centre site is already in place, giving a clearer sense of the site boundaries and ongoing changes within the town centre.

Local Vendors

To confirm our research, we spoke with the most trusted person of a South Asian background - Rahats Mum - who confirmed our findings and emphasised the importance of adding culturally relevant spaces within local areas. She highlighted how these spaces help reflect community identity and everyday use. As the new redevelopment will include many large businesses, we think it is important to retain the small business character to preserve the area's identity and make it feel more welcoming and familiar for local residents.



Rahats Mum

Through Food To Form

Back in studio, we treated these moments as evidence, feeding them into the design through discussion, precedent sharing, and scaled testing. Our next step is to turn this into more structured engagement, making sure we do it ethically and transparently, and that what we gather clearly informs design decisions rather than sitting on the side.

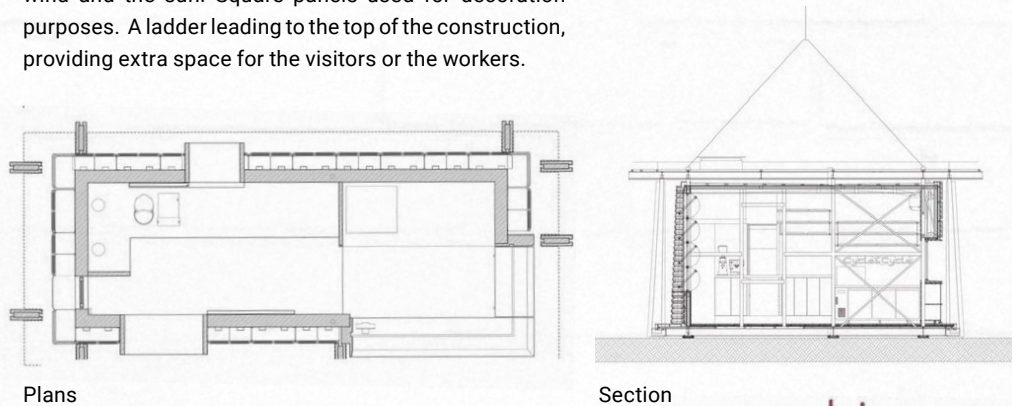


To immerse ourselves more we enjoyed some handcrafted sweets from a small family run business - the first of its kind in the area.

Precedents

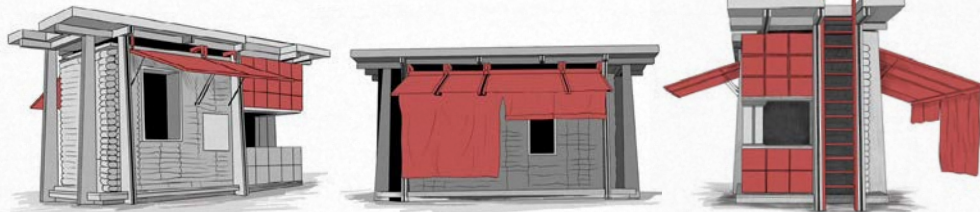
Pop-Up Cafe and Bakery located in China, built by F.O.G Architecture.

Some aspects of this precedent that can be used in our design include; blinds that can be transformed into a roof, which also have roll up curtains that provide more privacy, as well as protection from the wind and the sun. Square panels used for decoration purposes. A ladder leading to the top of the construction, providing extra space for the visitors or the workers.



Plans

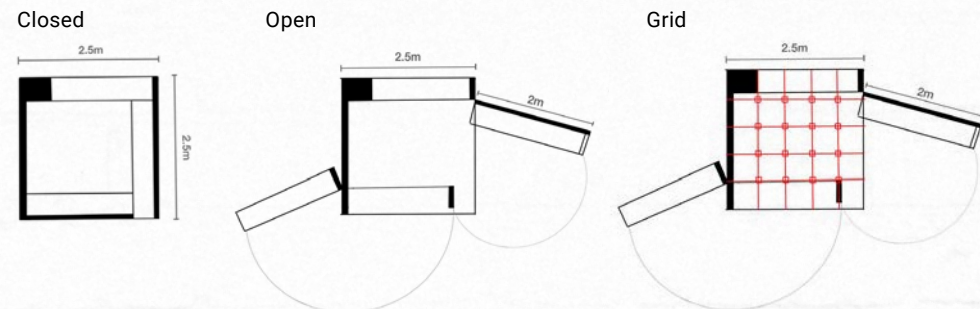
Section



Elevations

The Story Pod, by Atelier Kastelic Buffey, Newmarket.

A minimalist community lending library designed to encourage reading and social interaction. The solar-powered structure opens during the day to function as a public library and closes at night to become a glowing sculptural landmark. Built mainly from lumber, plywood, timber slats and polycarbonate panels, the project uses simple sustainable materials while maximising natural light. The adaptable folding elements and pivoting openings create seating and multifunctional spaces within a compact footprint.



Design Process

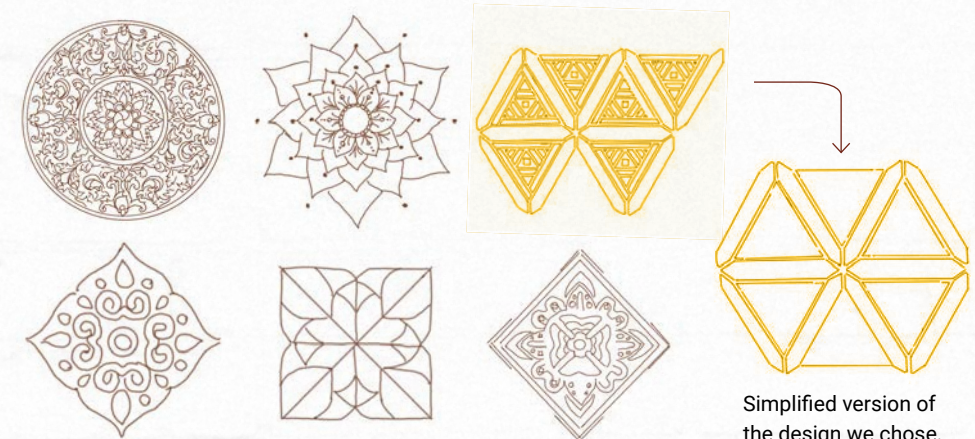
Visual Brief

Conceptually we thought of this form to be a cardboard box, a simple modular form that can be disassembled, opened up and closed. Michael wanted a lightweight structure, so this directed our attention to the timber frame construction, which works well with our modular concept.



South Asian Patterns

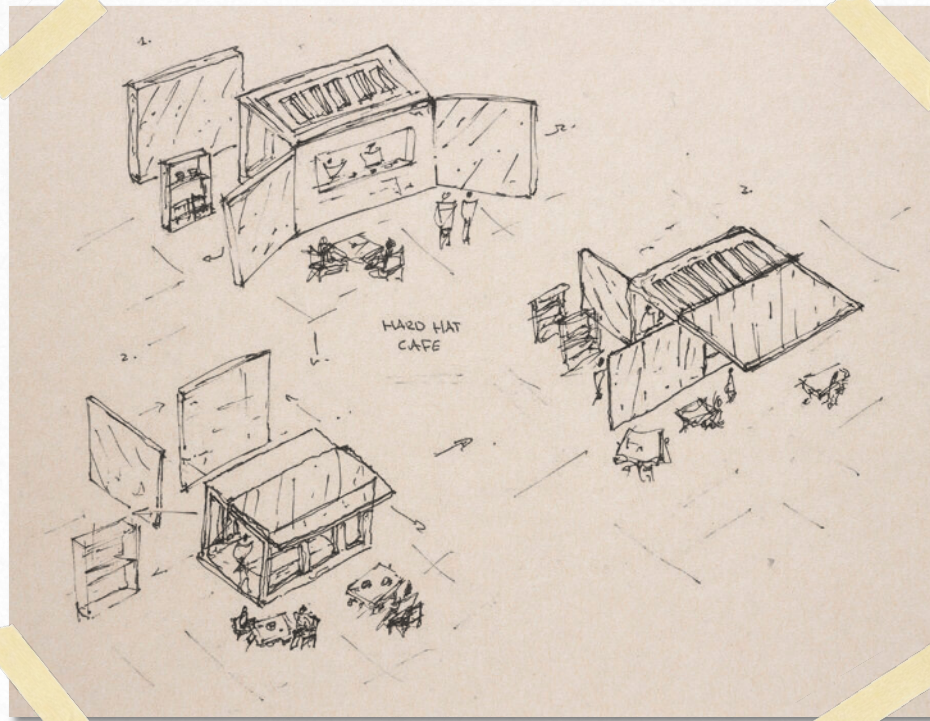
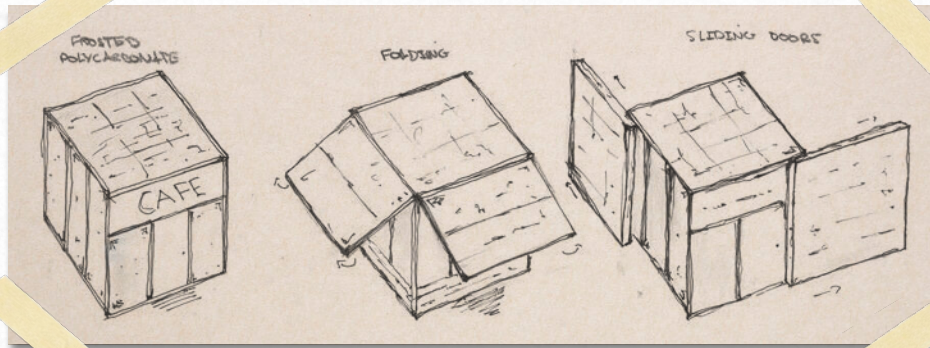
We explored South Asian patterns through a series of drawings, linking the research to the area's large South Asian community and cultural identity. We looked at traditional geometric and textile patterns, resulting in motifs that informed the proposal. We aim to use a simplified version within the design so it is easier and cheaper to manufacture, repair and replace if needed.



Simplified version of the design we chose.

First Ideas

Our first idea focused on mobility, sustainability, materiality and form. We kept the form simple to stay within budget and ensure the structure can be easily assembled and disassembled across different sites. The whole structure is designed to fit on a truck bed for easy transportation. We were encouraged



by Mike to work with timber, so we chose standard plywood and followed its dimensions. Our early iterations focused on the flow of the structure and how to best organise activities so they do not collide and can be easily packed away at the end of the day. As the structure is off grid it was also important to include portable services like water and an energy source.

Plans and Sections



Closed Plan

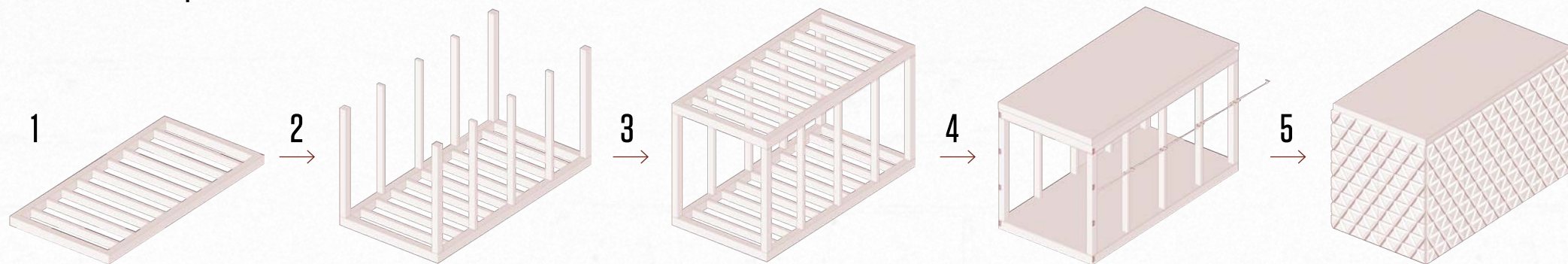


Open Plan

Short Section



Construction sequence



Axonometric structural opening sequence

CLOSED

→ OPEN



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:

e.crompton@mmu.ac.uk and j.fitzpatrick@mmu.ac.uk

BLOG

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