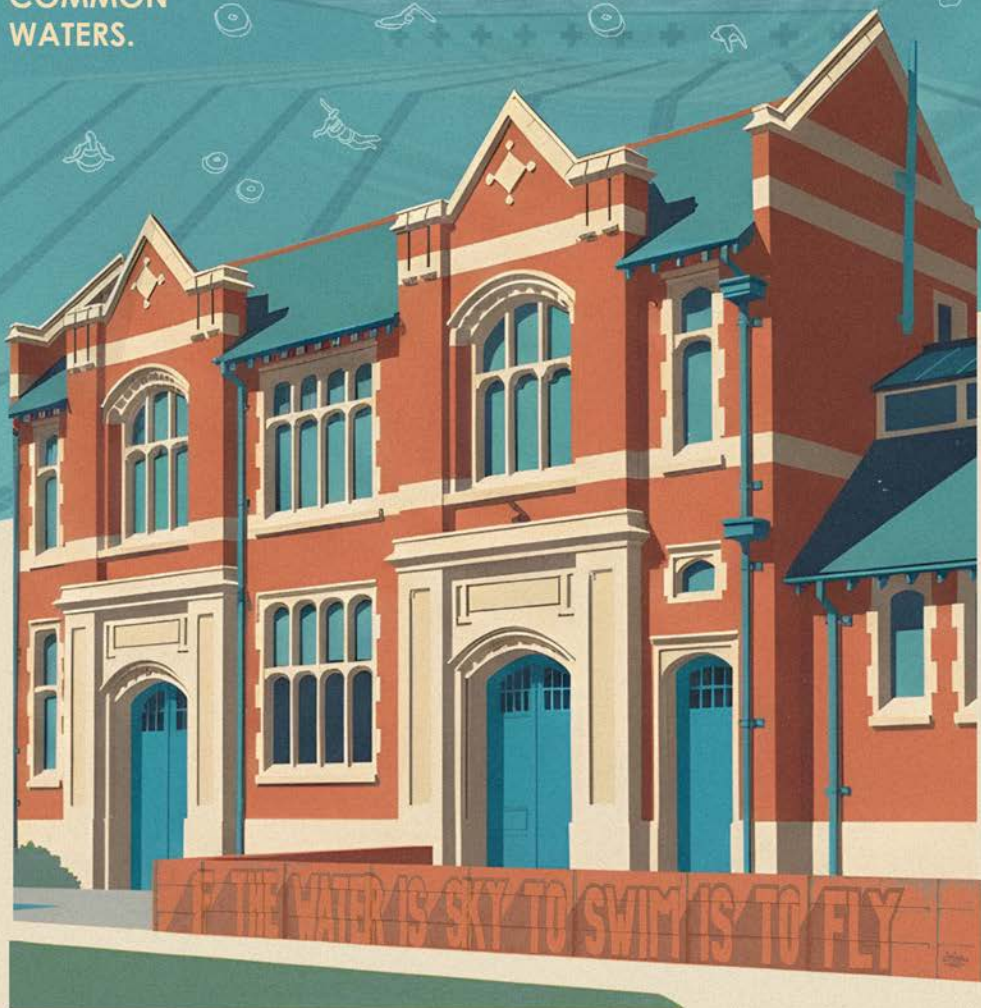


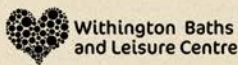
**MANCHESTER SCHOOL
OF ARCHITECTURE**

WITHINGTON

**COMMON
WATERS.**



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**MSA
LIVE 26**

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Collaborators

The project is in collaboration with Withington Baths - through an integrated engagement with both the locals, and the team at Withington Baths & Leisure Centre, the project aims to further strengthen the site's role as a community anchor

During our initial meeting with collaborator Dave Payne, a board member at Withington Baths, a detailed overview regarding the history of the existing building was provided. Following this, a discussion centred around the extensive project possibilities ensured a grounded base for design exploration

At the project core, the collaborators encouraged holistic local growth whilst ensuring community values were considered and applied accordingly to the proposed scheme

Introduction

[With] ington Common Waters

Withington Baths, opened in 1913, is Manchester's last surviving Edwardian public swimming pool - quietly shaping the social fabric of the local area for over a century, whilst articulating a civic ambition rooted in health, leisure and community

The legacy of the building experienced serious hardship within recent years, as managed decline and a withdrawal of council investment pushed the baths towards permanent closure. Despite this, locally driven activism ensured the building was saved allowing Withington Baths to continue prospering within the South-Manchester community

Our project emerges directly from this history - working in close collaboration with both local residents and the staff at Withington Baths, our team will develop a feasibility proposal that aims to consolidate Withington Baths as a genuine community anchor, promoting health and well-being, whilst fostering social interactions

An integrated scheme, fusing a sensitive renovation of the existing building with a proposed social housing and leisure development to produce architecture that takes its lead from the people who will inhabit it



Diving In

Understanding the Site

[With]ington Common Waters is a project that is centred around the relationship that exists between place and people. In order to ensure an effective working environment, rooted in the sharing of knowledge, skills and ideas, our initial team meeting was critical - an early ice-breaker, comprised of personal fun facts, sparked conversations surrounding individual interests, architectural aspirations and opportunities for skills development

Following our initial team meeting, the early stages of design were grounded in careful site observation and mapping - initial site diagrams, and a detailed site location map, allowed us to build a shared spatial understanding of the site and its wider context

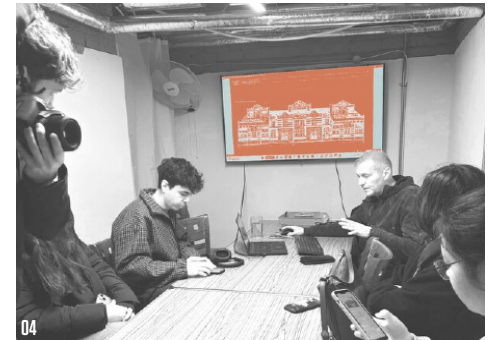
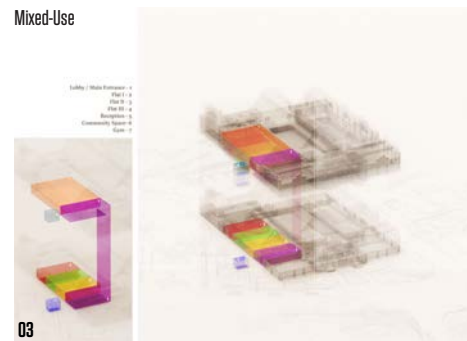
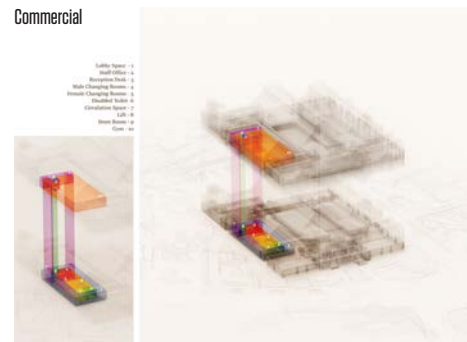
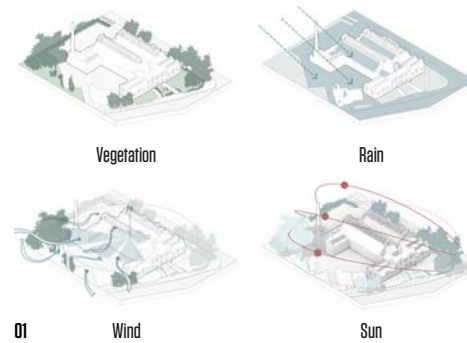
Following spatial analysis, our team moved into programming and early design thinking, exploring how the existing spaces might be reimaged, extended and integrated accordingly. Our initial design iterations were deliberately open, a means of asking questions rather than proposing answers, ensuring the team had a grounded base prepared for client collaboration

Our early stage thinking was tested directly through direct engagement with our client - during an initial meeting with our collaborator, we met Dave Payne, a Board Member at Withington Baths. Dave provided a detailed overview of the Baths' history and outlined the broad range of possibilities we could explore throughout this project

An emphasised element of the brief was the need for a new gym, to be delivered as an extension to the existing building. He encouraged us to think beyond a single-use addition, suggesting a mixed-use approach that could incorporate social housing, event spaces, and communal facilities, among other opportunities

Our initial client meeting was supported by early site engagement - we began speaking directly with local residents, gathering impressions, concerns and aspirations from people who actually inhabited Withington Baths. A structured public survey ensured our engagement process had a broad reach and captured a wide range of community voices

The team engaged creatively with all aspects of the initial process, ensuring a collaborative, efficient and enjoyable working environment



01 Initial Site Diagrams

02 Site Location Plan

03 Spatial Programming
Initial Design Iterations

04 Early Collaboration
Initial Client Meeting

05 Withington Walls
Initial Site Engagement

06 Initial Site Visit
Gathering Information

07 Public Engagement
Initial Public Survey

Initial Design

Vertical Learning

The project brings together students across different stages of architectural education, creating a structure where knowledge and capability flowed vertically. Rather than working in isolated year groups, our team operated as an integrated unit allowing the more experienced students to provide guidance in model making, design sketching and architectural representation. Additionally, this created a system where the BA1 students were able to confidently contribute fresh perspectives whilst practicing their architectural skills

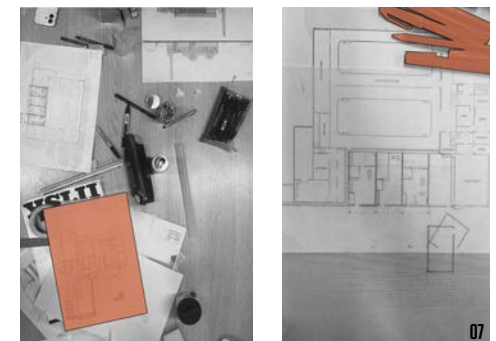
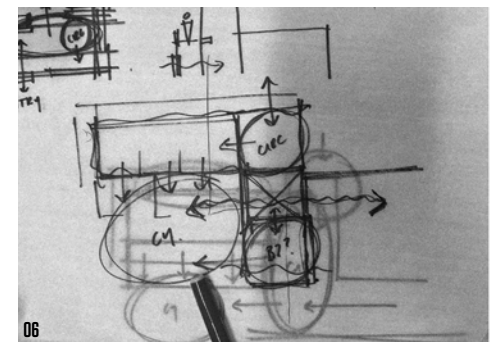
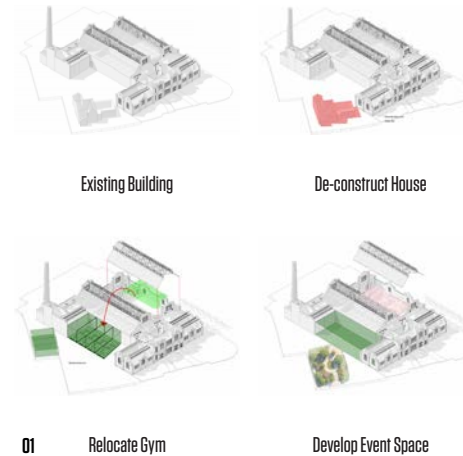
The initial stages of the scheme demanded a broad and developed skill set, focused on an understanding of the phasing strategy, material development and elevational application. The early stage design was explored and documented through a variety of architectural representation, notably physical and digital model making, sketching and mixed media collage, ensuring the scheme evolved in a fluid and considered way

Collaboration was itself a learned skill - coordinating across the year groups, managing shared workflows and communicating ideas clearly throughout the group demanded the development of communication, supported by constructive critique, continuous iteration and workflow review

Initial public and client engagement introduced a further dimension of professional development, as students learned to effectively translate architectural thinking into accessible language. This was critical to ensuring our entire team was able to engage productively with external individuals, a discipline central to community led practice

The early stage group design process responded clearly and critically to initial public engagement and ensure a varied set of iterative design visuals were produced. This collaborative process provided a foundation prior to our main client meeting with Withington Baths where further design conversations would ensue

Across this initial design phase, the vertical studio model ensured that skill development was never purely individual - knowledge was shared openly, gaps were collectively identified and integrated learning allowed for productive scheme development for detailed design and further client engagement



- 01 Phasing Analysis
- 02 Material Exploration
- 03 Elevation Application
Initial Design Iterations
- 04 Early Collaboration
Initial Group Designing
- 05 Vertical Learning
Skill Development
- 06 Scheme Development
Initial Sketch Idea
- 07 Scheme Development
Early Detailed Design

Collaboration

Client Engagement Meeting

The client engagement meeting was an important stage in the project as it was an opportunity to present our ideas so far and receive feedback as well as encouraging discussion on how the design will continue

During the meeting, multiple design options based on his original priorities were presented which allowed further discussion rather than restricting the meeting to choosing a single proposed design. Approaching the meeting like this allowed the client to pick and choose individual aspects of the design which we could then focus on to develop further. This helped the group to better understand his priorities in having multiple housing units to make the project commercially viable

The discussion was supported through drawings, sketches and models to ensure that the ideas were clear between the client and group members. A variety of visual work helped prevent any misunderstandings in the design and ensured that the points from the discussion were correctly incorporated into the design

The meeting also supported vertical learning as members from all year groups were present and engaged, allowing students earlier in their architectural education to receive a broader understanding on the process and importance of client engagement

The public engagement aspect following the client engagement meeting introduced a more participatory type of collaboration where the public, members of staff and the client were able to physically place movable massing blocks onto the scaled site model. These blocks were colour coded in order to show the client's needs in terms of functions, for example, housing and gym space. This also encouraged group discussion when members of the public interacted with the model together simultaneously as it promoted conversation between them about what they see as a priority for the baths

Following the meeting, the client also engaged with the model to visually reinforce the client's priorities for the project. This encouraged the client to get involved with the design himself, rather than being restricted to only reviewing the group's existing proposals. An important final process that ensured our team had a grounded base for subsequent design development

01 Client Engagement

02 Engagement Response

03 Client Design Meeting

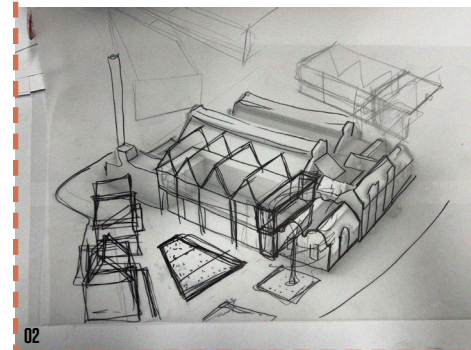
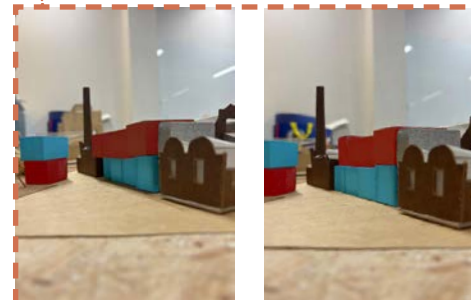
04 Public Engagement

05 Client Engagement



01

The client engagement process was vital in ensuring our developed design aligned with the client's desired project requirements



02



03



04



05

Developed Design

Client Engagement Response

Following our team engagement with both the client, and the wider public, we were able to start developing a detailed design response that was commercially viable, responding accordingly to the client's required needs

The developed design response involved advancing architectural feasibility drawings for a scheme that involved accessible social housing, with an integrated gym space and public garden. Additionally, we began speculating, through precedent exploration and architectural visualisation, how the existing gym space could be adapted into an event space that ensured commercial viability whilst restoring the architectural essence of Withington Baths

The precedent study focused on Victoria Baths, especially the gala pool which was adapted by adding flooring to host sporting events, but has now evolved into a flexible venue for weddings and other cultural events. We adopted this approach in Withington Bath's proposal for a new event space as flexibility and multifunctional use became a priority to the design, such as including a storage area to allow the temporary elements to be moved efficiently to transition between different community events

Following the client engagement, we also gained a clearer insight into the preferred aesthetics and materials used in the facade of the gym and housing structure. Discussions identified the client's material preferences early on, which established a direction we could follow throughout the rest of the design process. This allowed us to respond to the client's needs closely and ensure our design aligned with the needs of the wider Withington community

Design development progressed through iterative housing sketches informed by feedback from the client engagement meeting, where the client communicated a requirement for sufficient housing units to ensure both financial viability and planning approval. The integration of accessible ground floor housing units fostering inclusivity, further strengthening the project's connection to the Withington community, whilst reflecting our ethical design intentions

The explored concepts were refined through iterative sketching, supported by material exploration to clearly articulate the exterior facade intentions

01 Event Space
Precedent Study

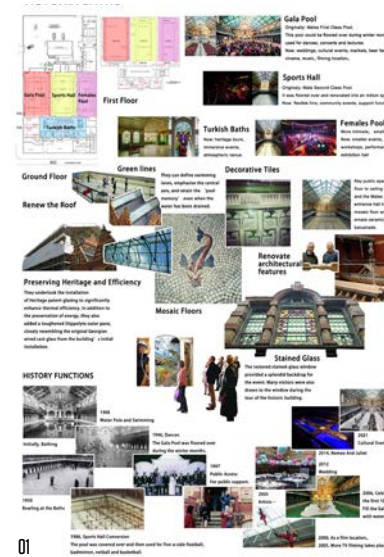
02 Event Space
Sketch Visuals

03 Event Space
Developed Visuals

04 Community Space
Conceptual Visual

Developing the Retrofit Space

A precedent exploration into Victoria baths supported a design speculation surrounding the developed use of the bath space as a multi-use event space



Developing the New Build Spaces

A visual exploration of how the public garden acts as a central connection uniting the developed gym space and social housing units - a key design move articulating a clear relationship between the architecture and the wider Withington community



Proposal

Final Design

The final design output synthesised the relocation of the existing gym, the development of accessible, social housing and speculative concepts for the reinstated bath space, ensuring a well integrated scheme rooted in connecting the wider Withington community

Following multiple client design meetings, supported by various means of public engagement, our team were able to develop and visually articulate a resolved design that responded clearly to the key requirements voiced by the client - it was important for us to ensure a commercially viable scheme, that would secure planning approval, whilst strengthening the Withington community. Through iterative, collaborative and engaged design development, the final output voiced a scheme rooted in the desired needs of the client

As a collective, the team developed the design through various means of visual communication, notably diagrams, physical/digital model-making, architectural drawings and rendered visualisations. This set of media works as a collective feasibility study for the Withington Bath scheme

01 Existing Block Plan
1:500 @ A3

02 Proposed Block Plan
1:500 @ A3

03 Ground Floor Plan
1:200 @ A3

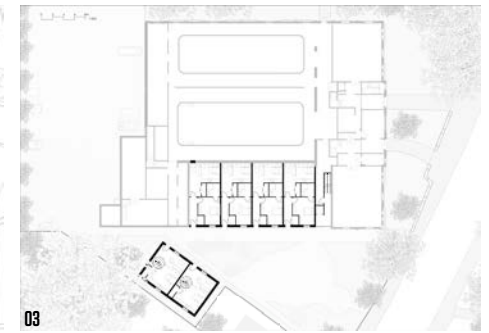
04 First Floor Plan
1:200 @ A3

05 South Elevation
1:200 @ A3

06 West Elevation
1:200 @ A3

07 Key Section
1:100 @ A3

08 Social Housing
Internal Visual



Proposal

Reflection

At the outset of the project, some obvious uncertainty around communication and the division of responsibilities existed - whilst Master's students demonstrated greater confidence in presenting ideas and approaching tasks, undergraduate students were less assured in their contributions. In response to this, it was important that the group developed a team structure rooted in vertical learning, knowledge sharing and integrated collaboration

As the project progressed, the team grew more balanced, as we developed a clearer understanding of individual's strengths and capabilities, ensuring a more productive and supportive working environment. More experienced members of the team began to naturally assume mentoring roles, offering guidance in architectural model-making, both physical and digital, concept development and representation. Equally, the students earlier on in their architectural education offered enthusiasm and fresh perspectives which significantly supported the design process. This vertical team structure ensured knowledge, skills and ideas flowed both ways, supporting a collaborative environment centred around complete team involvement

Team engagement was fundamental throughout - regular meetings ensured consistent discussions surrounding design progress, whilst allowing feedback and task allocation throughout all stages of the project. Communication became a critical aspect of the process, particularly when coordinating various workstreams - a significantly rewarding outcome was our efficient division of responsibilities through clear and early communication surrounding individual strengths and capabilities resulting in a much more manageable and efficient workload

Overall, the project proved to be a significant learning experience, demonstrating the value of collaboration across a diverse team of students with varied architectural experience. As a collective, we discovered that effective teamwork is not rooted in the uniformity of thought, but through listening, adapting and combining various ideas towards a united end goal

References

01 Existing Visual

HM Government, (2015). The Building Regulations 2010: Access to and use of buildings: Approved Document M. London

Niall McLaughlin architects (2021) The New Library, Magdalene college. Cambridge

02 Proposed Visual

Victoria Baths (2026) Home - Victoria Baths. Available at: <https://victoriabaths.org.uk/>



ABOUT

Each year the MSA LIVE programme unites Masters Architecture year 1, Masters of Architecture & Adaptive Reuse 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

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