

# MANCHESTER SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

Rambler's Ringway is collaborative collection of students acting alongside The GM Ringway Association and CPRE Lancashire with the simple aim to increase the volume of users along the Great Manchester Ringway walking trail. The project is a circular 200mile walking route around the outskirts of Manchester that links up the city's greenspaces via 20 distinct stages and encourages the exploration of the outdoors through the use of public transport. The shared aim of the venture between the groups, is to unite new communities in the sharing of the trail - through innovative engagement via architectural interventions, striking signage and public outreach.

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# GREEN CORRIDOR



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The  
countryside  
charity

MSA  
LIVE 26

# Introduction

## GREEN CORRIDOR

Greater Manchester Ringway's current collaboration with MSA Live's Group 18, aptly named 'Green Corridor', includes a collection of students from Foundation to Postgrad - across both Architecture and Landscape Architecture disciplines.

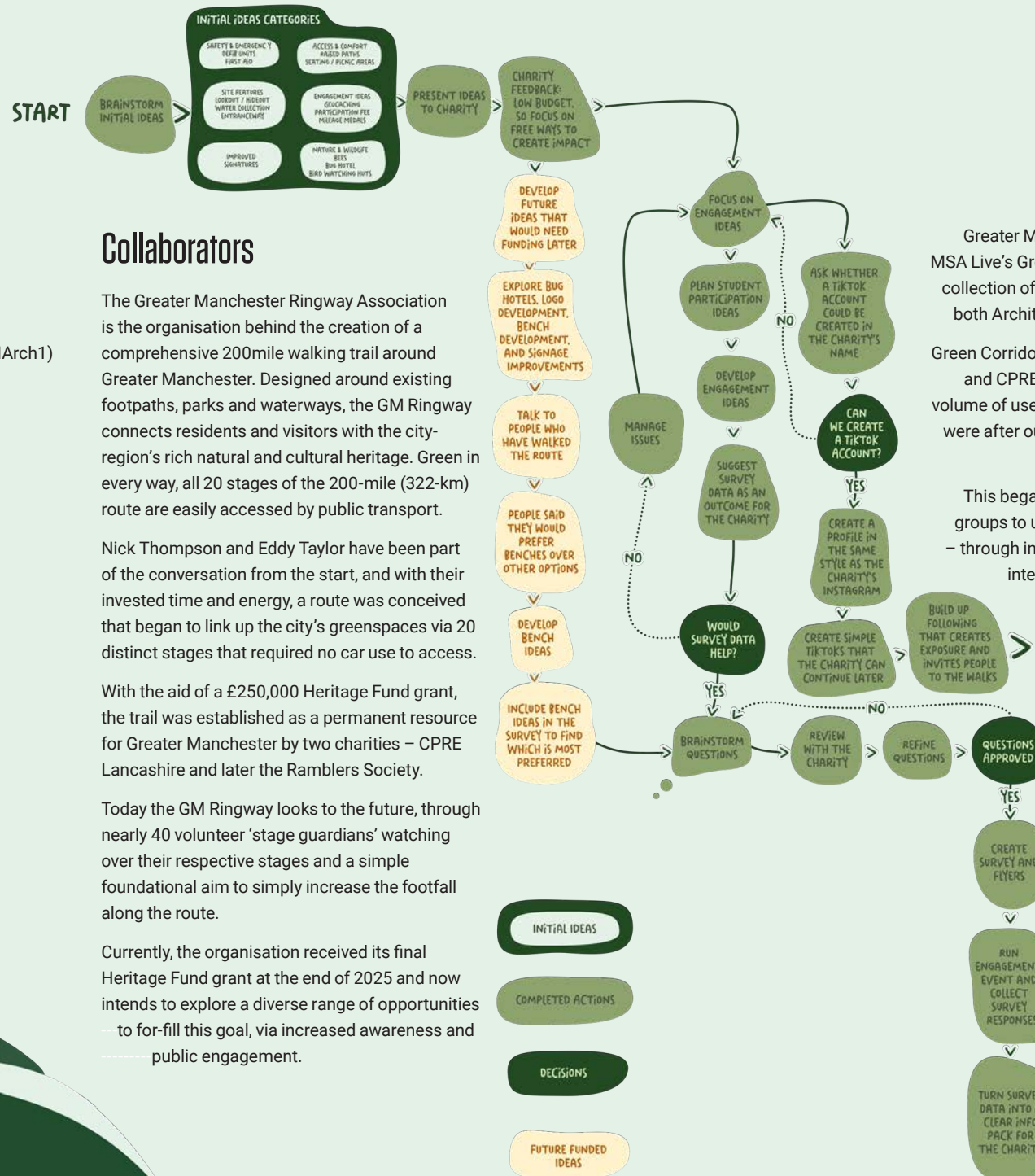
Green Corridor acted alongside The GM Ringway Association and CPRE Lancashire with the simple aim to increase the volume of users along the route. To achieve this, GM Ringway were after outcomes rather than outputs from the team and helped develop a unique brief with this in mind.

This began with the initial aim of the venture between the groups to unite new communities in the sharing of the trail – through innovative engagement possibly via architectural interventions, striking signage and public outreach.

Through discussions with GMR, this developed into the production of a document that would be produced and divided into three distinct stages: Evidence, Engagement and Evolution.

With the aim for this body of work to act as a starting point for GMR to move forward with a wider engagement plan that was supported by data from a survey Green Corridor created.

A plan to gather data was constructed that focused on the existing awareness of the GMR project, GMR's website, what would encourage more usage of the trail and what barriers currently existed that prevented that from happening. The data was collated and presented in a way that could go on to help influence GMR's next steps in promoting the scheme.



## Team

- Ashwanth Sivasankaran (MArch1)
- Karl David Raphael Gellamucho (MArch1)
- Li Yisheng (MArch1)
- Rebecca Tomkins (MArch1)
- Lyu Jingyi (MAAR)
- Wu Ke (MAAR)
- Noah Ahmed (FDN)
- Sehar Hussain (FDN)
- Freddie Geoghegan (BA1)
- Mohammed Jawad (BA1)
- Ruth Groffman (BA1)

## Collaborators

The Greater Manchester Ringway Association is the organisation behind the creation of a comprehensive 200mile walking trail around Greater Manchester. Designed around existing footpaths, parks and waterways, the GM Ringway connects residents and visitors with the city-region's rich natural and cultural heritage. Green in every way, all 20 stages of the 200-mile (322-km) route are easily accessed by public transport.

Nick Thompson and Eddy Taylor have been part of the conversation from the start, and with their invested time and energy, a route was conceived that began to link up the city's greenspaces via 20 distinct stages that required no car use to access.

With the aid of a £250,000 Heritage Fund grant, the trail was established as a permanent resource for Greater Manchester by two charities – CPRE Lancashire and later the Ramblers Society.

Today the GM Ringway looks to the future, through nearly 40 volunteer 'stage guardians' watching over their respective stages and a simple foundational aim to simply increase the footfall along the route.

Currently, the organisation received its final Heritage Fund grant at the end of 2025 and now intends to explore a diverse range of opportunities – to for-fill this goal, via increased awareness and public engagement.

# Diving In

Understanding the project and getting to know the team:

The ethos of MSA Live is to work with a live 'client' and project that enables an enactment of professional interactions, moving outside of personal comfort zones, team building and group innovation to work together in creating the best outcome for the collaborator.

We started our first meeting by introducing ourselves, before we dove into discussing ideas and concepts regarding the brief from GMR after conducting desktop studies to search and visually explore the website before meeting the collaborator.

Following this we began to establish some informal roles within the group, based on everyone's skills and strengths discovered via suggestions and knowledge at this early stage.

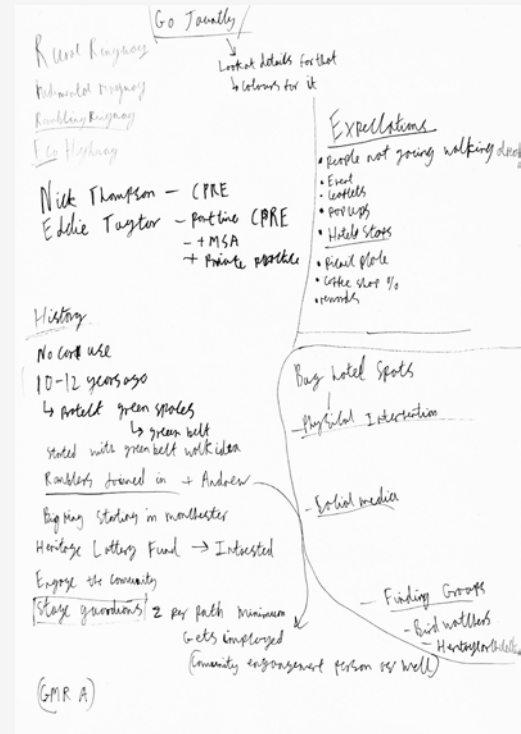
The process of sharing expertise created a safe and inclusive environment that was pivotal to our later success as a group. We highlighted opportunities for undergraduate and foundation students to learn new software during the module

# Understanding the Objective

Our initial meeting with the collaborators Nick and Eddy began with them kindly talking through their brief, describing the history behind GMR and clarifying their aims for their involvement in MSA Live. They were clear from the beginning on the request for outcomes rather than outputs, so were not specifically looking for an architectural intervention, like other groups may have designed for their collaborators.

The meeting highlighted this as a key point that required further development for us as a group to manage the client's quite ambiguous requests with the requirements of our module brief.

Through conversation with the team, we were able to establish that our best method to engage with the public would be via a survey to collect the largest data set over the widest area - in comparison to an in-person event at one specific location. Following this we devised an action plan with team members detailing who would produce the project timeline, risk assessment, budget plan and ethics proposal, so as to determine key dates, considerations, costs and issues.



## Walk Stages

Over the period from the launch of MSA Live, several of the team embarked on site visits to various stages, a key step in deepening our understanding of the Greater Manchester Ringway itself, its objectives to encourage an increase in users and the challenges that we might face.

From conducting our 'site analysis' via walking several of the walk stages ourselves, we focus on noticing features and facilities (or the lack of said amenities) along on the routes.

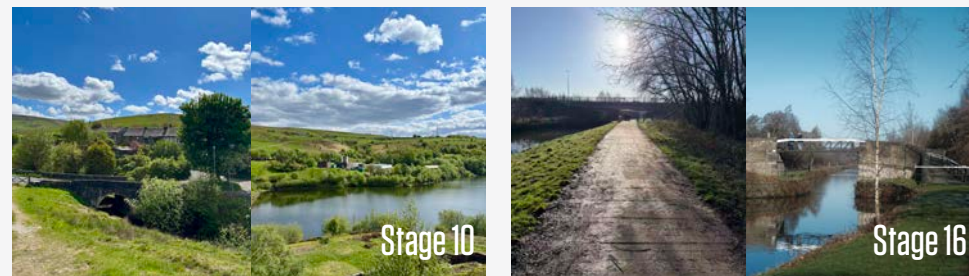
"Similarly, for 4 hours straight there were no benches, and the gaps between signs were too large to keep walkers on track."

- Ruth Groffman (Walking Stage 6)

"Similarly, for 4 hours straight there were no benches, and the gaps between signs were too large to keep walkers on track."

However, the route included no places to buy water so walkers would have to absolutely plan in advance in order to conduct the walk safely on warmer days"

- Rebecca Tomkins (Walking Stage 10)

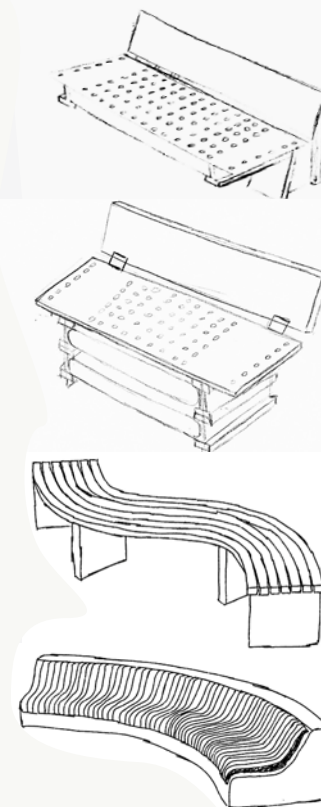


## What the Site Needs

Stages 6, 9, 10 and 16 were walked from February to May, thus a wide scope of weather conditions were experienced by the group. By observing the physical space, this provided us insights into accessibility and type of different landscapes each stage offered. We kept in mind the types of survey questions that may be useful to collect, with the client's limited budget as a key aspect to consider.

One identified avenue for increasing the number of people walking the route (that was not constrained by budget) was to increase the GMR's social media presence and assess ways to improve their existing social media and website. We proposed that questions exploring this route regarding the public's perception of the existing website be included in the survey too.

Alongside this, the strongest physical contender to the clients considerations culminated in the consensus that a bench design would fit the best as an architectural intervention for us to design as a group, due to the perceived lack of seating options along the stages. Moreover, the walking of the stages allowed us to refine the type of survey questions required- with these focusing on existing or non-existing knowledge of the GMR, walking apps, habits and frequency. Following this we subsequently began to design a draft survey collating these questions.



## Development of Survey

To enable us to engage with the city regarding Greater Manchester Ringway, a short survey to gauge interest and to understand the public's perceptions on the organisation, and walking as a whole was designed.

As we developed our ideas for the survey and discussed the wording of potential questions, we communicated with the collaborator to discern their desired outcome. After sending Eddy the draft survey, he suggested steering the survey further towards raising GMR awareness through collecting contact details of takers.

## Boosting Engagement

In order to increase our level of engagement with the local community we decided to increase responders by distributing leaflets with a link to the survey on Manchester's Oxford Road for a more personal approach that allowed for potential conversations and personal positive interactions with the public.

Following our in-person meeting for a final check with Eddy on the 28th of April, our survey went live and we received 49 responses by sharing the form online with family and friends.

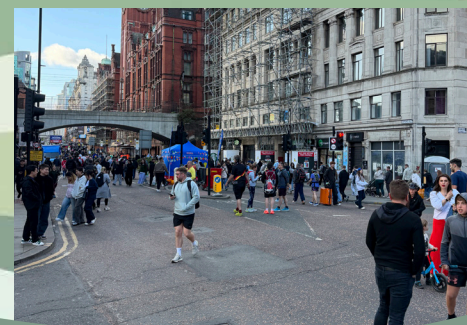
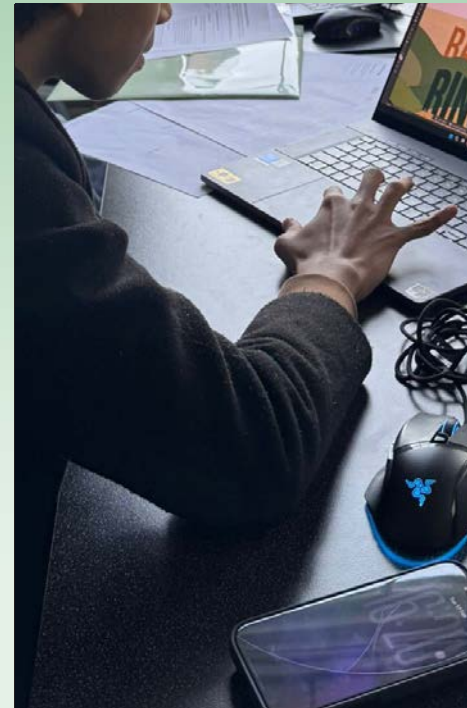
On the 11th of May, our group's engagement flyering event resulted in an additional 77 responses - more than doubling the number of responses through the distribution of the leaflets and bringing our total to 126.

Leafletting was therefore a powerful tool to encourage engagement with the public and fostered reflection and learning- it brought us closer to individuals that we may not have conversed with, without the leaflet. Reaching additional people enabled discussions and highlighted a range of perspectives and conversations that further contributed to the importance of in-person connections.

The survey was closed on the morning of the 12th May and considering it was open for only 2 weeks we were delighted as a group that the survey had been completed by over 100 people.

We identified earlier in the project that social media would be a key driver in increasing the number of responses to the survey and the group all shared an Instagram specific graphic of the leaflet on their stories to further reach individuals within their social circles.

Additionally social media was a tool we had highlighted as a feature to improve for GMR, which led to the group's creation of a TikTok account for GMR - the details of which will be handed over at the conclusion of MSA Live. Several Tiktok posts were made and are currently engaging well in terms of likes and sharing - furthering our goal to increase exposure and awareness for the GMR.



# Survey Data

## HOW COULD THE GREATER MANCHESTER RINGWAY WEBSITE BE IMPROVED?



**100+ RESPONSES**

- LOGO & BRANDING** 28%  
 e.g. "Better logo", "Too blurry", "Looks outdated", "Needs modernising", "Simplify the logo"  
 The most common theme. Many feel the logo looks old, pixelated or unclear and needs a modern, professional refresh.
- LAYOUT & USABILITY** 22%  
 e.g. "Cleaner", "Easier to navigate", "Less clutter", "Dropdown too long on mobile", "Better mobile experience"  
 Respondents want a cleaner, more modern layout that is easy to use on all devices with clear navigation.
- CONTENT & INFORMATION** 15%  
 e.g. "More route details", "Difficulty ratings", "Access points", "Public transport links", "GPX files", "Parking info"  
 People want more practical and detailed information to help plan and enjoy their walks.
- VISUALS & MEDIA** 12%  
 e.g. "More photos", "Videos", "Scenic shots", "Better quality images", "More green"  
 Many want more high-quality, inspiring visuals that showcase the beauty of the trails and scenery.
- SOCIAL MEDIA & AWARENESS** 10%  
 e.g. "More social media presence", "Promote on TikTok", "More advertisement", "Make it more visible"  
 Respondents want greater awareness and better use of social media to engage more people.
- FEATURES & INTERACTIVITY** 8%  
 e.g. "Interactive maps", "Progress tracker", "Route finder", "Downloadable maps", "User comments"  
 Ideas for new features that would make the site more interactive, useful and personalised.
- OTHER SUGGESTIONS** 5%  
 e.g. "Less pop-ups", "Better fonts", "More cares info", "Events roundup", "Safety info", "More green colours"  
 A mix of smaller ideas to improve the overall experience.

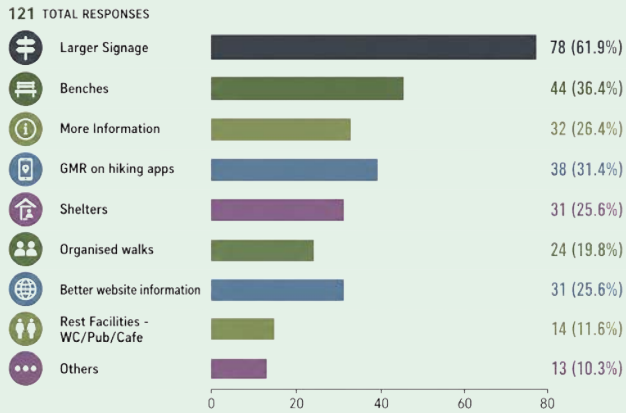
These are the main themes from over 200 responses from visitors, hikers and local users. The biggest priorities: Logo, layout, content and visuals.

**OVERALL SUMMARY**  
People love the idea and the routes, but most agree the website could look more modern, be easier to use and offer more useful features and information to enhance the experience.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Refresh the logo and modernise the brand
- Improve layout and mobile experience
- Provide more route details and practical info
- Use more stunning photos and videos
- Increase social media presence and awareness
- Add interactive features and downloadable maps

## WHAT COULD BE PROVIDED ON THE WALKING ROUTE THAT MIGHT ENCOURAGE YOU TO USE?



- LARGER SIGNAGE** 62%  
 e.g. "bigger signs", "clearer wayfinding", "more visible signs"  
 The most requested feature to help people find their way and feel confident on the route.
- BENCHES** 36%  
 e.g. "more benches", "places to sit", "resting spots"  
 Important for comfort and making walks more enjoyable for all users.
- MORE INFORMATION** 26%  
 e.g. "route info", "maps", "history and nature info"  
 Better information helps people plan their walks and learn along the way.
- GMR ON HIKING APPS** 31%  
 e.g. "on OS Maps", "digital routes", "integrated in apps"  
 Making the Ringway easy to find and navigate digitally.
- SHELTERS** 26%  
 e.g. "shelters from rain", "covered areas", "places to take cover"  
 Protection from the weather encourages more people to walk year-round.

# Concept Proposals

- METAL SEAT**  
 Material: perforated steel plate  
 Feature: long service life, lightweight, retexturing
- WOOD BACK**  
 Material: pressure-treated timber board  
 Feature: long service life, comfortable and soft touch surface
- METAL SUPPORT**  
 Material: recycled rail track  
 Feature: long service life, sustainable and stable
- WOOD HIKER-BOX**  
 Material: pressure-treated timber board  
 Feature: long service life, waterproof, stable
- METAL SEAT**  
 Material: perforated steel plate  
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- WOOD SEAT**  
 Material: pressure-treated timber board  
 Feature: long service life, comfortable and soft touch surface
- CONCRETE SUPPORT**  
 Material: cast-in-situ concrete  
 Feature: long service life, waterproof, stable
- CONCRETE CURVE BENCH**  
 Material: cast-in-situ concrete  
 Feature: long service life, smooth surface, retexturing
- EXISTING GRASSLAND**  
 Material: existing grass  
 Feature: integrated into the natural environment
- WOOD SEAT**  
 Material: pressure-treated timber board  
 Feature: long service life, comfortable and soft touch surface
- CONCRETE BASE**  
 Material: cast-in-situ concrete  
 Feature: sturdy and durable
- EXISTING GRASSLAND**  
 Material: existing grass  
 Feature: integrated into the natural environment

A hikerbox for storing shared emergency supplies, as well as emergency food and medicine

Using recycled scrap rail contributes to sustainable strategies and reduces waste

Curved seat, allowing hikers to sit facing different views

Simple support structures can minimize damage to natural ground surfaces.

Built directly on the existing lawn, blending seamlessly into the landscape

The wooden seat surface offers a comfortable, warm feel. The gaps between the planks allow for drainage.

Built directly on the existing lawn, blending seamlessly into the landscape

A large, curved concrete base that is both sturdy and durable, as well as beautiful.

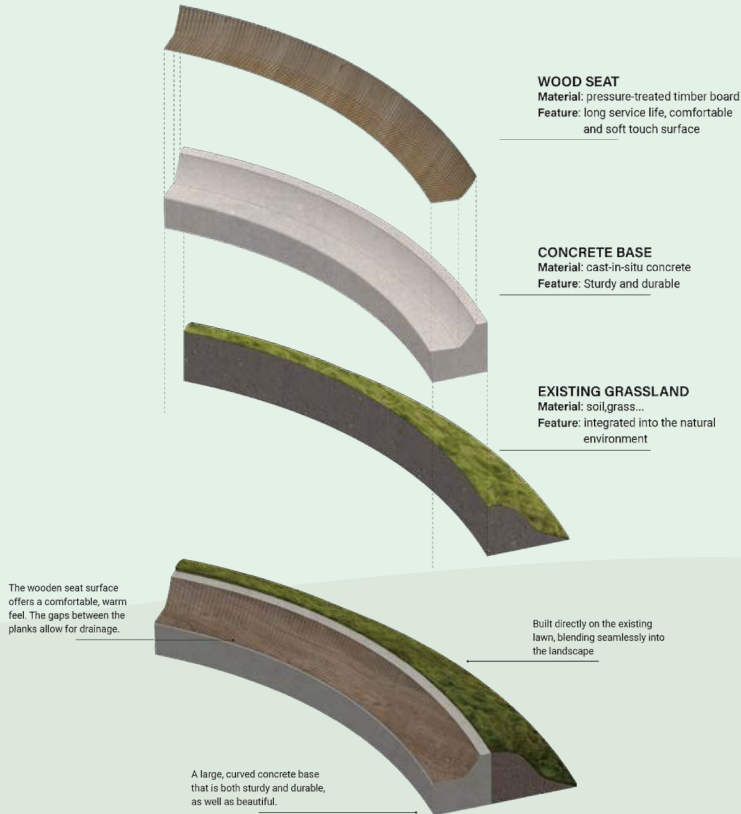
# Final Bench Proposal

To enable Based on feedback from group members following their on-site hiking experience, our group believes that the lack of rest areas is an issue with the Greater Manchester Ringway at present. The absence of adequate rest areas for hikers may discourage casual hikers from using this route, which could lead to a decline in the number of users. Therefore, we have decided to design proposals for the installation of benches along the route.

While designing the survey for this hiking project, our team proposed five ergonomic designs for hiking benches. These included two steel benches made from recycled railroad tracks, two concrete benches designed to blend seamlessly with the natural landscape, and a minimalist backless bench crafted from curved wooden planks.

After analyzing the survey data, the large, curved, landscape-integrated bench made of concrete and pressure-treated wood proved to be the most popular choice. It measures approximately 4 meters in length, 0.8 meters in width, and 0.9 meters in height. The bench was installed by excavating a portion of the existing soil and placing a concrete base. The pressure-treated wood planks are secured to the concrete base using a hidden steel frame. The gaps between the planks help prevent water accumulation. People found this design both aesthetically pleasing and well-suited to the surrounding atmosphere. Furthermore, its large size is ideal for groups of hikers, particularly families.

We have therefore compiled all the proposals regarding the benches and forwarded them to our collaborators. This will enable them to use these proposals in future upgrade plans to attract more users to the Greater Manchester Ringway.



# Reflection

Our journey as a team through MSA Live 2026 has been filled with many opportunities to reflect and reconsider our decisions and choices as we worked together with the collaborator to interpret an incredibly open brief. These continuous moments of reflection advanced our design proposal and informed our creation of a usable document for our collaborator.

## Understanding the Collaborator:

One of the fundamental challenges our team experienced was managing the collaborators desire for outcomes over outputs (in the form of increased public awareness of the GMR) vs our own understanding and fulfilment of our module brief for MSA Live.

The initial brief was completely open, and with the collaborators' unrestricted imagination combined with our own, proved difficult to narrow down into a specific route for the team to take in terms of the design and direction for the project.

At times this did translate to an overwhelming volume of ideas, from which we needed to extract both what was feasible in the time frame and what was appropriate for their hypothetical budget.

Regardless, communicating with Eddy and Nick via email and in meetings to explain all our initial ideas, we were able to develop a further understanding of the brief. Alongside advice from our tutors, we discussed questions and clarified proposals that helped forge a clear path that culminated with our team successfully assisting with the collaborator's desired outcomes.

## Expectations and deliverables:

Key drivers in the project were managing the expectations of the collaborator and the ability for the group to work as a team deliver the outcomes required.

For instance, delegating the tasks out and managing the team's engagement with MSA Live we found was challenging due to the lack of clarity in the initial brief. Which therefore perhaps created an initially high momentum of ideas followed by a lower engagement from the team.

## Engagement Week:

Moving into the formation of a specific direction for the team with more clarity on roles and tasks were divided out in the 'Action Week', where the team came together to construct the publication, presentation and collaborator's strategy document.

To summarise, the project timeline we created initially was largely successful and well-paced. Where we encountered issues in the changing of our group name, this was navigated professionally with the collaborator and conveyed to the group in a timely manner with a new name being chosen and integrated quickly - avoiding the hinderance of our project running smoothly.

## Collaborator Strategy Document:

The final strategy documentation provided for the Greater Manchester Ringway will support the collaborator with a compilation of all information relevant to our survey data and findings, alongside offering design proposals for benches and social media login details and strategy ideas that they can use and share to gain further support.

The document serves as a model for future potential collaborations between the GMR and MSA Live next year- that would enable both GMR to develop and direct the brief into something with a specific direction that students can support and deliver.

## Lessons learned:

Throughout MSA Live 26, the masters students took time to present Revit tutorials, answer studio questions, review work and share their skills on Photoshop and Procreate primarily to the BA1 and Foundation students.

In this we are all extremely grateful to our team of students whose efforts and positivity kept the group alive and resulted in the success of this project. Particularly the BA1 and Foundation students articulated that the leafleting engagement task pushed them out of their comfort zones into conversing with the public and provided them confidence in their own abilities. They also expressed how the discussions and informal advice sessions helped them in their own studio work in terms of backing their own ideas, presenting their work and being able to contribute to a greater extent in group discussions from the safe space cultivated.

Finally, we especially would like to extend our appreciation to our collaborators, Eddy and Nick, who bestowed their knowledge and passion for the project to our MSA Live journey – listening and guiding us through our endless suggestions!

The experience of MSA Live 26 has been full of learning and effort from us all, and has highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, live clients and, most importantly, friendship.



## 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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## BLOG

[live.msa.ac.uk/2026](http://live.msa.ac.uk/2026)

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