# MANCHESTER SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

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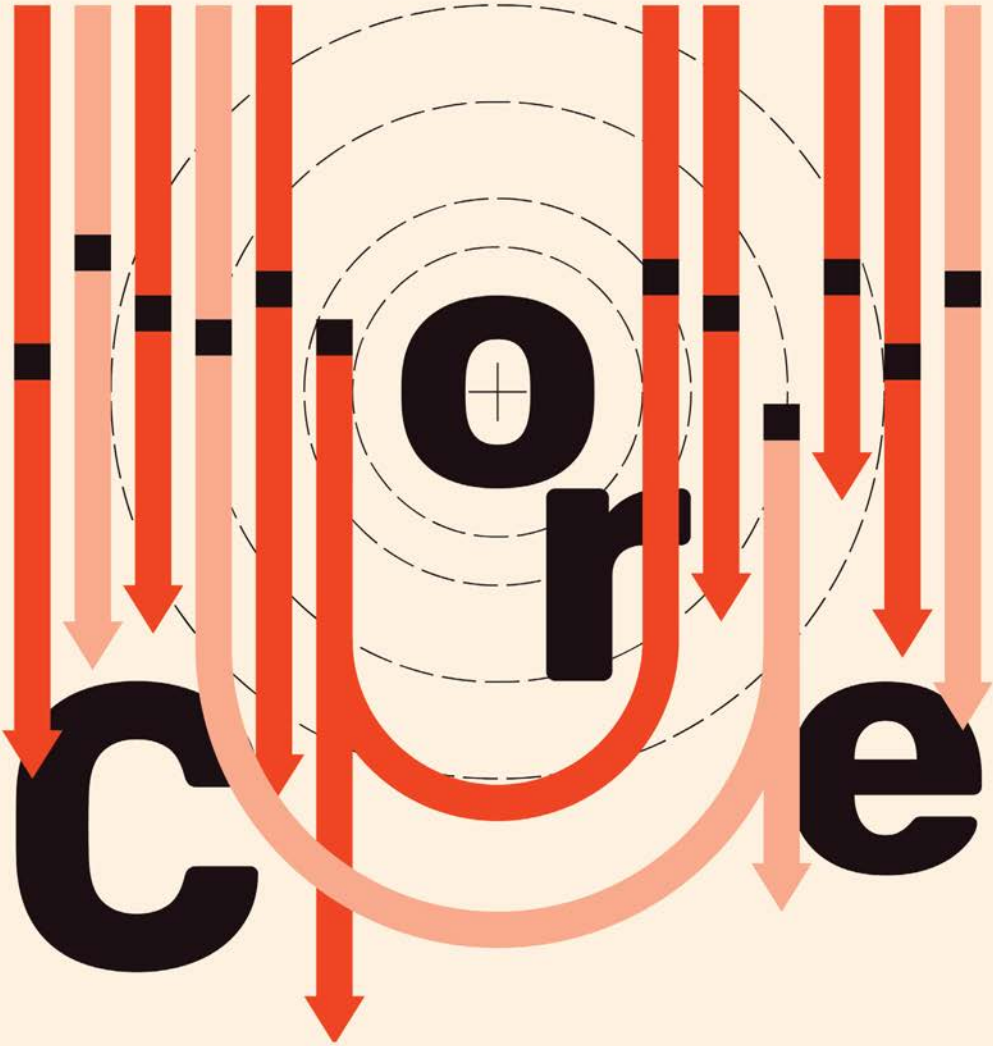


MANCHESTER 1824 The University of Manchester

Manchester Metropolitan University

MSA LIVE 26

PhaseTwo

## Team

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Jake Hancock [MArch1]
Nicholas Leang [MArch1]
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## Collaborators

CORE Projects are our collaborator for this project. They are a not-for-profit Community Benefit Society based in Manchester, working to make renewable energy more accessible, affordable and community-led. Their work focuses on supporting local groups to develop energy solutions that are owned by, and designed with, the people who use them. Through their knowledge of community energy, retrofit and sustainability, CORE Projects helped us understand the wider aims of the project beyond the building itself. Their approach is not only about reducing energy use, but also about tackling fuel poverty, building local confidence and creating long-term social value.

The Dandelion Community in Manchester is our client for this project. Their building is an important local space used for worship, learning, support and wider community activities. As students, we saw Dandelion as more than a site for retrofit; it is a place with existing relationships, memories and everyday uses that needed to be understood carefully. Our role was to listen to their needs and consider how energy retrofit ideas could support the comfort, resilience and future use of the building. By working with Dandelion, the project became rooted in real community priorities, allowing us to think about sustainability in a more human and practical way.



## Phase Two

In a joint effort between Core Projects and the Manchester School of Architecture (MSA), we collaborated with the Dandelion Community Centre to develop bottom-up design proposals aimed at upgrading building performance. This partnership was rooted in the belief that sustainable architecture must be driven by the people who inhabit the space daily. To ensure the proposals were both technically sound and community-led, we employed a rigorous methodology involving multi-stage client engagement sessions, internal design workshops, and detailed measured surveys.

A key highlight of the process was our Community Engagement Event. This allowed us to move beyond drawings and engage in real-time dialogue with the centre's users. By gathering qualitative data on how the space is lived in, we were able to tailor our proposals, such as thermal envelope improvements, solar strategy and acoustic strategy to the specific needs of the Dandelion community.

The Dandelion Community Centre serves as a critical lifeline within its neighbourhood. It is a multifaceted hub that hosts food banks and clothes donations, manages support groups, and runs an independent café. Notably, it houses a community gym specifically designed to support less-abled individuals, providing a safe and inclusive space.

Our primary goal was to support Dandelion's transition into their next phase of energy management and long-term sustainability. By identifying quick wins and long-term retrofitting strategies, we have helped provide a roadmap for a healthier, more cost-effective building. Reducing overhead costs means the centre can redirect vital funds back into its social programs, ensuring its doors stay open for those who need them most.

For the team, this opportunity provided invaluable exposure to real-world client engagement. Navigating the bridge between academic theory and the practical expectations of both our professional collaborators and the local community was a transformative experience. We had the unique opportunity to learn from one another, aligning our professional procedures, communication styles, and project expectations through peer-to-peer learning. Ultimately, the project outcomes have successfully aligned with community-driven goals and the specific requests of our collaborators, proving that architecture is most powerful when it is a shared endeavour.

# PROJECT OBJECTIVES

## Dandelion Objectives

Dandelion Community is a church-founded community group in Wythenshawe, Manchester. Open and inclusive, it welcomes people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. Inspired by Christian values and Jesus' life, it tackles poverty, supports vulnerable residents through weekly community sessions, and promotes social justice, local action and collective care for all.

## CORE Objectives

CORE Projects develops local, sustainable energy solutions in areas affected by fuel poverty. Working with residents, organisations and leaders, it uses a non-profit model that reinvests surplus income into communities. Through co-designed technologies like solar panels, heat pumps and wind turbines, it supports affordable energy and net zero.

## Phase Two Objectives

**Rosie**

"Starting MSA live I wanted to understand what it's like to work with a real client and balence their expectations with reality whilst creating something both parties are happy with."

**Wai Wu**

"Through out MSA live project my achievements were working together, sharing ideas with the other year groups, and also gaining experience from them and the collaborators."

**Nicholas**

"Through participatory design for MSA Live, I aim to improve my communication and project management, producing an outcome that benefits the collaborator and it's community."

**Callum**

"I really want to use the 'Architect in Collaboration' module to challenge my current skill set. For me, it's all about becoming more effective in how I engage and manage a design team, especially as I look to explore related professions."

**Qixin**

"Through MSA Live, I hope to understand real practice, communicate with stakeholders, respond to practical needs, and develop professional knowledge and collaboration skills."

**Yiyao**

"In the MSA live programme, I want to learn about the practicalities of sustainability, improve teamwork and gain experience by learning how to work with clients by working with experienced team members."

**Sean**

"In the project I wanted to understand what happens in the architectural process and learn from those who have worked in practice."

**Peiyun**

"In the project, I want to learn about the application of sustainable design and energy-saving technologies in practical projects."

**Tan**

"Through the MSA Live project, I aimed to improve my teamwork skills and gain hands-on experience by collaborating with experienced group members."

**Jake**

"In the project I wanted to work on client communication through drawing and modelling and through that work on creating a practice wide language by delivering up-skilling to team members, and coordinating drawing work."

**Iliana**

"I wanted to gain a better understanding of designing for a community. I am interested in learning how architecture can respond to the needs of people through engagement, collaboration and thoughtful design decisions."

# IDEAS TO ENGAGEMENT

**Meeting 1: First Group Meet-Up**
**03/02/2026**
Our project began with icebreakers, which helped us get to know each other and understand how we might work together. We discussed our strengths and weaknesses to allocate roles, while giving people opportunities to learn from others. The day ended with meeting Mike, who introduced CORE's aims, answered our questions and helped us agree on the next steps, including arranging a meeting with Alexandra.

**Meeting 2: Poster Design**
**11/02/2026**
We met at MTC to discuss our group contract and brainstorm ideas for the project poster. Many of our concepts explored themes of energy, technology and "cores", while also trying to incorporate CORE's identity into the design

**Meeting 3: Meeting Alexandra**
**17/02/2026**
We began by voting on the poster design before meeting Mike and Alexandra. Together, we discussed realistic outcomes for the project and agreed to focus on the Dandelion Community. We clarified the main priorities and ended the session with Rob, who gave us direction and shared examples from his own work that could support our process.

**Site Visit**
**23/02/2026**
We visited Dandelion to carry out a measured survey and meet staff, volunteers and community users. As there were limited architectural drawings available, much of the visit focused on recording measurements so we could produce accurate plans, elevations and a site model. This visit helped us understand the building as a lived community space, not just a retrofit project.

**Meeting 4: AutoCAD Workshop**
**03/03/2026**
Collaboration and peer learning became one of our group's strengths. The MArch students led an AutoCAD workshop for the BA1s so everyone could contribute to the architectural drawings. Jake showed patience while supporting the download process and teaching the software. We then divided into smaller teams to draw plans and elevations.

**Drawing Session**
**10–11/03/2026**
We continued producing digital plans and elevations, with some members meeting in person and others working online. These drawings formed the basis for our 3D model, which would later support our community engagement by helping residents visualise our ideas.

**Meeting 5: Initial Design Ideas**
**17/03/2026**
Using images, plans and trace, we began testing ideas. We identified thermal comfort as a key issue, as the 1960s building was too cold in winter and too hot in summer. We also considered accessibility, especially as Dandelion supports elderly and disabled users.

**Meeting 6: Design Review**
**24/03/2026**
We presented initial ideas to Alexandra. The discussion helped us refine our proposals and consider how designs could respond to the community needs.

**Easter Meeting**
**16/04/2026**
During Easter, we met online to review drawings for solar, acoustic and energy-saving strategies. Developed them into A3 posters for the Dandelion engagement event, where residents could respond using emoji stickers.

**Community Engagement**
**22/04/2026**
After 3D printing the model, we held a community outreach event at Dandelion. Residents shared ideas around heating, noise, gym acoustics, solar panels and dividing larger spaces. Using stickers and conversations, we gained feedback and built a stronger connection with the community, making us more motivated to improve the space for its users.

Image Top:
Meeting with Collaborator, Alexandra from CORE Projects

Image Bottom:
One of our members, Iliana interacting with the community member.

# COLLABORATION

**To follow a democratic team method, we followed the seven methods from The Tyranny of Structurelessness, by Jo Freeman aka Joreen (1970).**

### Delegation

Whilst delegating the various tasks for MSA Live and for our clients, we clearly established roles and responsibilities for each group member that matched the strengths and skills they proposed in our first meeting, as well as delegating tasks that group members wanted to do. This meant that every member was happy and confident with their presented task.

### Taking Responsibility

Every member of our group played a critical part the success of our project. This was aided by the great group atmosphere present throughout all our meetings, providing a friendly and approachable atmosphere, in which all ideas were considered fairly and equally.

### Distribution of Authority

From our first meeting, it was established that MArch1 students were ideal candidates to take charge, particularly due to their understanding of working with a client in practice, and how to approach the task in front of us.

### Rotation of Tasks

From the beginning, we mentioned our strengths and weaknesses and were able to assign roles based upon this. Once we had found our strengths in context with the project, we chose to stick with these roles.

### Fair Task Allocation

Our task allocation was done particularly based around the skillset each student was able to provide. Part of making the tasks fair was to run workshops to upskill the BA1s by teaching AutoCAD so that they could provide useful input for the elevations for the model.

### Sharing Information

After every meeting tasks were delegated through our joint WhatsApp community, which had different channels for the various teams withing our group. Meeting times and places were able to be shared easily and communication with the collaborator through Callum was possible through this chat.

### Equal Access to Resources

All information was located on a shared OneDrive organised by week and by name. All material was shared including all our photos from every meeting, site visits, as well as our community engagement event.

Image Top: Brainstroming ideas for our energy retrofit proposal

Image Bottom-Left: Discussion for poster design

Image Bottom-Right: 3D Print of Dandelion Community Center for Engagement Day

# DESIGNING THROUGH PARTICIPATION

**Arnstein's Ladder of Participation**

Arnstein's Ladder of Participation places our project in the Placation stage. Through collaborative discussion, post-it annotations, and emoji reactions, community members were asked to react to the plans. This allowed participants with a visible and meaningful opportunity to voice concerns, preferences, and suggestions, yet without granting direct decision-making power. Even though the workshop promoted participation and communication, the authority remained with the group's decisions.

**Candy Chang's engagement**

A particularly relevant example is Before I Die, where members of the public were invited to write personal thoughts on a public wall. The project transformed passive observers into active participants and demonstrated how simple interactive tools can encourage meaningful community dialogue.

## Our Engagement Event

To understand what the community members would like to see we used proposal sketches instead of "line like Before I want to die". Post-it notes and emojis was the way of communicating instead of written chalk notes.

**Key methods Used**

Interactive Sketch Review

Participants gathered around printed retrofit proposal sketches and discussed spatial qualities, accessibility, atmosphere, and functionality.

Emoji Feedback

Instead of formal questionnaires, participants reacted using emoji markers to express immediate emotional responses to the proposals.

Collaborative Annotation

Community members added comments, ideas, and concerns directly onto the drawings using post-it notes and annotations.

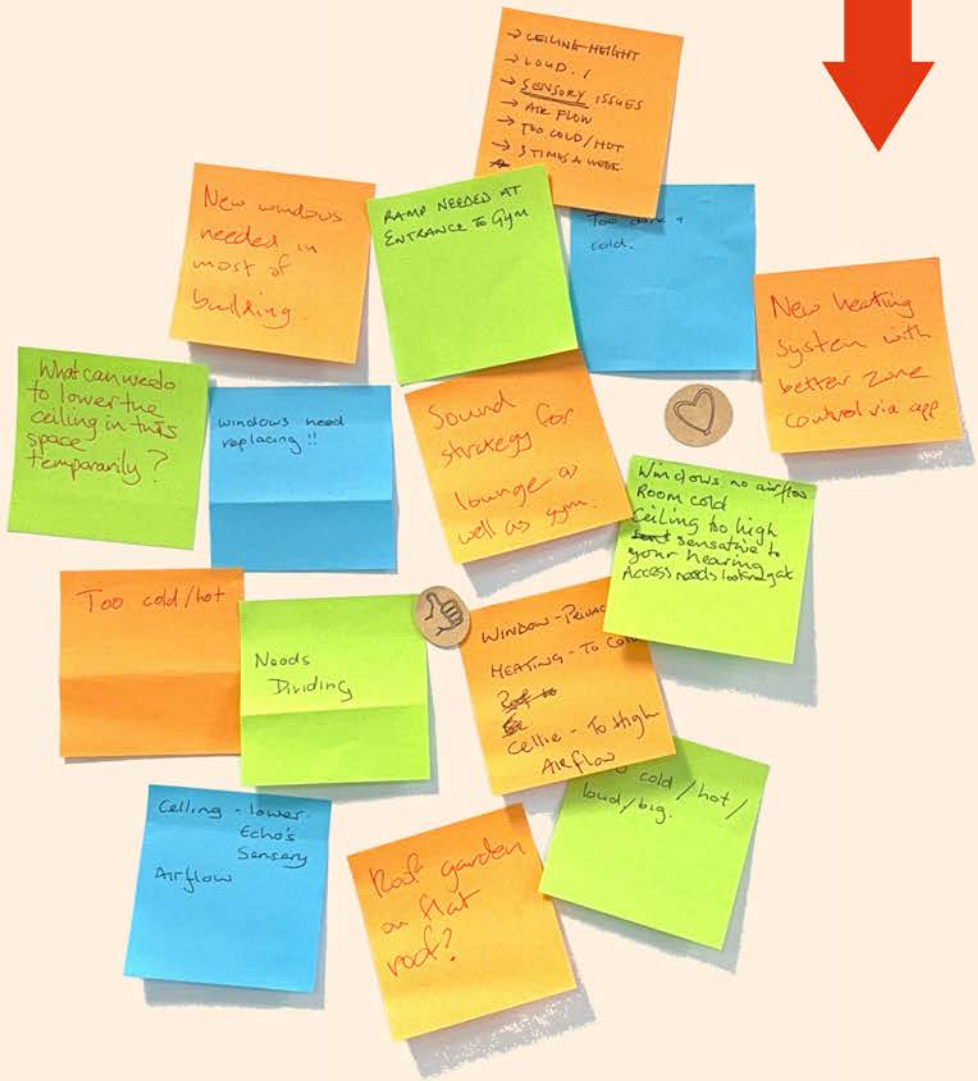



Image Top:
Post-it Notes collected during the Engagement Day

# ENGAGING THROUGH DIALOGUE

On 22 April, our team visited the Dandelion Community to present these proposals, collect feedback directly from residents, and understand how they currently experience the building.

During the engagement activity, we displayed our drawings and provided stickers for residents to place onto the proposals. This allowed them to show which ideas they liked, which areas concerned them, and where they felt changes were most needed. As the event progressed, residents became increasingly enthusiastic and confident in expressing their views. They wrote comments on the stickers and shared verbal feedback with the team, giving us a clearer understanding of the building from the perspective of the people who use it regularly.

As Dandelion Community Centre supports many people with disabilities, accessibility was an important part of our engagement approach. Some residents found it easier to speak than to write, so our team listened carefully, asked questions and helped record their comments. This helped create a more equal and inclusive environment, where residents could participate in a way that suited them. We wanted the process to feel open, respectful and supportive, rather than formal or intimidating.

Several key issues emerged from the feedback. Many residents felt that the building needed new windows, as the existing ones do not open properly and contribute to poor ventilation. Heating was also a major concern, with rooms often feeling too cold in winter and too hot in summer. Residents suggested that a new heating system, potentially using heat pumps and app-based controls, could improve comfort and energy efficiency.

Specific rooms also received detailed comments. The lounge was described as noisy, oversized and uncomfortable, with suggestions for smaller zones, better storage and improved temperature control. The conference room was seen as dark and gloomy. In the gym, residents raised concerns about high ceilings, poor airflow, lack of privacy, echo, noise and sensory discomfort.

Overall, residents responded positively to many of our proposals. The ideas that received the strongest support included photovoltaic panels on the roof and acoustic panels in the gym to reduce noise. The collaboration went very well, and the level of support exceeded our expectations. It reinforced the importance of listening to residents and designing with the community to support comfort,

Image Top: Close-up of the architectural model and feedback notes

Image Bottom-Left: Residents and students discussing the project model

Image Bottom-Right: Residents engaging with the display boards

# REFLECTION

As our final output, we proposed a solar strategy of south facing solar panels for the Dandelion Community Centre in an effort to equip the community with a long-term resilient and energy efficient sustainability strategy.

This proposal extended our understanding of sustainability beyond engineered interventions, emerging through continuous communicative and collaborative effort with our primary collaborator, Core Projects, insights gathered from The Dandelion community, as well as internal group discussions, all which informed project's narrative.

The project reinforced the importance of designing with communities rather than simply for them with the help of Core Projects, who were able to provide valuable insights and feasibility studies owing to their longstanding engagement with the Dandelion Community. In this context, community engagement was understood as a continuous process that informed the project's direction from its conception.

The ongoing collaborative dialogue consequently informed a final proposal that considered the limitations of the existing building, effectively ensuring that the strategy responded realistically to the site's current conditions rather than presenting an idealised solution detached from its context.

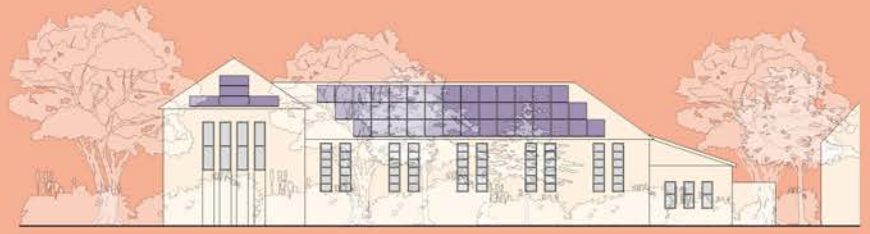
The site visit and community engagement event allowed us to directly experience how our proposed changes may impact how the space is experienced in relation to thermal comfort and sensorial feedback. Even within a short period of time, the environmental conditions described by its users were perceptible, emphasising the needed for a community-sustained, long-term mitigating strategy.

This continuous dialogue ultimately informed our decision to explore solar energy as a practical and achievable strategy, within a process that enabled a real world understanding of architectural practice through its collaborative nature, requirements for technical design outputs, and responsiveness to client and community input. First year students were the main benefactors of this learning process, with the help of master's and adaptive re-use students who eased their transition into hands-on, practical architecture through their previous experiences.

Image:
Completed planning drawings, including plan and two elevations


**Plan**

**East Facade**



**South Facade**

## 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.

## STUDENTLED
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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