

**MANCHESTER SCHOOL
OF ARCHITECTURE**



**[RE]WEAVING
ACCESS**

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**MSA
LIVE 26**

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Collaborators

[Re]Weaving Access are collaborating with the Silk Museum, Macclesfield. Our primary point of contact throughout this process has been Natalie Lane, Education Coordinator at the museum, whose insight into the building's day-to-day use, visitor experience and educational ambitions has been central to shaping our proposals. Natalie's involvement has allowed our design development to remain grounded in the real needs of the institution, its staff and the communities it serves.

Introduction

[Re]Weaving Access

[Re]Weaving Access are collaborating with the Silk Museum to showcase the diverse history of their town, along with their incredible historical collection of looms, textile patterns and costumes. It is a collaborative initiative to celebrate the historic heart of Britain's silk industry. The museum serves as the custodian of this remarkable legacy, telling the story of local craftsmanship, industrial ingenuity, and entrepreneurial spirit through its collections and exhibitions. Beyond preservation, the museum is committed to inspiring contemporary creative practice and fostering meaningful connections within its community, guided by core values of accessibility, education, and collaboration. As architecture students and designers, we are working in direct partnership to develop architectural proposals that address its aspirations for greater inclusivity and an enhanced visitor experience. Our interventions are grounded in public engagement and consultation, thus concentrating on three key areas: accessibility, signage, and spatial organization. Together, these proposals aim to create a more legible, intuitive, and welcoming journey through the museum. One that honours its historic character while supporting the museum's broader mission to keep Macclesfield's creative heritage alive, relevant, and accessible to all.

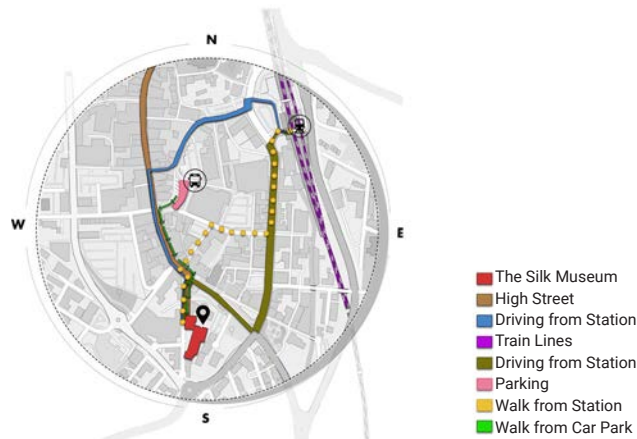
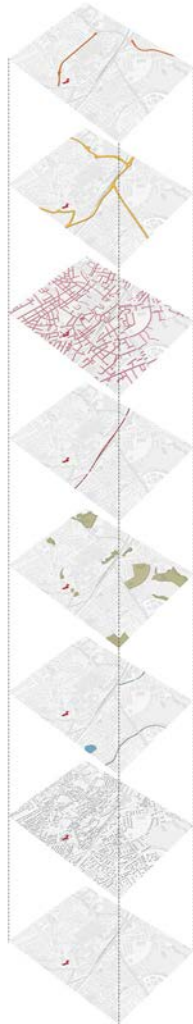


Site Context

The Silk Museum is located on Park Lane in Macclesfield, a market town located south of Manchester. Central to Macclesfield, it is surrounded by retail businesses. The museum itself covers two adjacent sites; Paradise Mill (housing the old silk looms) and the Silk Museum (housing more general exhibitions). However, the majority of Paradise Mill is privately owned and used as HMOs, aside from the top floor where the looms reside. A small plot in front of Paradise Mill connects it to The Silk Museum's garden but is not currently accessible to the museum making connectivity between the two sites awkward.

The Silk Museum is just an eight minute walk from Macclesfield train station, making it an easy journey for a day trip visit. It is also just a five minute walk from the nearest car park, Duke Street Car Park and Park Lane and the surrounding streets provide on street parking, allowing visitors to park closeby to the museum

Through talks with the museum staff and visitors on the engagement day, it was found that many visitors to the Silk Museum are local residents to Macclesfield. Who find the commute from their homes doable by walking or by bike.



While the Silk Museum and Paradise Mill are next to each other on Park Lane the two buildings are not connected to each other. Due to the semi private ownership of Paradise Mill, currently the only way to traverse between the two sites is to exit one and walk down the street to the other.

Site Visits

Before the engagement activity day we completed two site visits to the Silk Museum. The first of which was a tour of the museum by Natalie Lane who leads Education and Community. The second of which was done as a measurement survey.



On our first visit Natalie took us on a tour of all the spaces in the museum while explaining issues with access and spatial organisation within the museum. We learnt about the current issues with accessibility for those with movement difficulties through the main entrance. Due to the current spatial layout, visitors often get confused and skip over the majority of the ground floor exhibition spaces as they are only accessible through the shop.

Site Survey

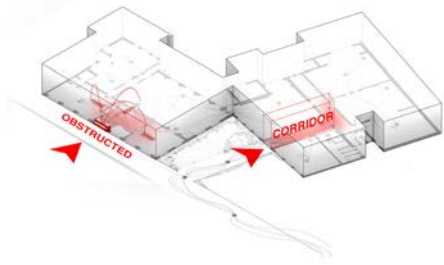
Several group members visited the site to survey the existing ground floor spaces relevant to our proposals, providing an opportunity for more informal conversation with our collaborator Natalie and allowing us to discuss possible interventions in greater depth. During the visit, a group of art students were painting within the narrow corridor, an observation that proved immediately valuable insight to our design development, demonstrating that the existing circulation route was insufficient for the space's current use and reinforcing the need to rethink the relationship between movement, occupation and spatial arrangement. Accessibility presented a further challenge; as a Victorian building, the museum contains numerous uneven floor levels, narrow thresholds and changes in level that were not fully apparent from drawings or our initial visit. Experiencing these constraints firsthand firmly established accessibility as a central consideration to be resolved within the design.



Determined Issues

Access

Access emerged as a key challenge at both the urban and architectural scale. Many visitors struggle to locate the Silk Museum within the town, while the current entrance is difficult to identify, lacks step-free accessibility, and provides an abrupt arrival experience. Visitors with movement restrictions have to be taken through the side garden entrance, which contributes to a feeling of 'otherness'. The pavement outside the main entrance is thin and currently no space is available for visitors to pause and ready themselves to enter, which can contribute to the blocking of foot traffic on the street. Together, these issues limit how clearly and confidently visitors can approach and enter the museum.



Signage

Signage emerged as a key challenge in shaping how visitors discover and understand the Silk Museum. Limited visibility across Macclesfield reduces awareness of the museum, while inconsistent internal wayfinding makes it difficult to navigate and follow a coherent story. A signage strategy can promote the museum within the town and strengthen the connection with Paradise Mill as parts of one shared heritage experience.



Spatial Analysis

Spatial analysis revealed the need to reorganize the museum's layout to create a clearer and more intuitive visitor journey. By establishing a welcoming point of arrival, a coherent narrative sequence through the collections, and a defined conclusion indicating towards the mill. Currently the main exhibition spaces have to be accessed through the museum shop. For new visitors this is confusing as the exhibitions themselves feel disorganised (an Egyptian room, followed by a Macclesfield history room, followed by loom rooms). The staff at the Silk Museum say with the limited space they have struggled to reorganise the exhibitions.



Engagement Activity Day

For the engagement activity day we designed three separate activities to tackle the three determined issues. We set up a stall within the Silk Museum and asks visitors and staff to take part.

Mapping Routes & Wayfinding

Visitors will use a large map of Macclesfield with image markers for familiar local hotspots, then, using tracing paper overlays, participants will draw the routes they took to the museum. Each tracing layer captures visitors' journeys, and once layered together, the drawings reveal common routes, intersections, and repeated movement patterns, informing us where signposting could go and which entrance appears first.



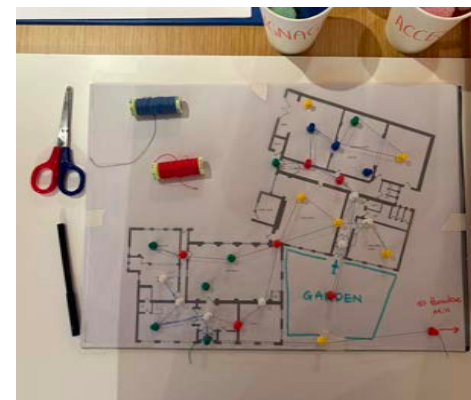
Priorities & Feedback

This activity is mainly aimed at staff, but visitors can also take part. The activity will be split into three sections: Access, Signage, and Spatial Reorganisation. Visitors will be given small coloured pompoms to place into the box that reflects the type of change they feel is most important. This helps us understand the priorities of both staff and visitors, and supports later decisions for the proposal. For each category, first-draft sketches and early ideas will be displayed so visitors can better understand the proposed changes. Post-it notes can also be used to leave comments, suggestions, or highlight anything that may not work well spatially.



Movement Through the Museum

Visitors and staff will use a printed museum layout with pins stuck on each doorway and room, then, using threads, map out the route through the museum from entry to exit based on how they would like to experience the space. Each tracing layer will capture around three journeys, allowing common movement patterns and blockage areas to appear once all the strings are layered together.



Engagement Activity Day

The mapping and wayfinding activity helped us understand how visitors navigate and experience place finding in the town, and identify potential locations for signage and wayfinding interventions so that our accessibility enhancements can start at a larger scale.

This Movement activity helps us understand circulation, movement through the museum, and key access points that could influence future spatial rearrangement and wayfinding decisions.

The most important issue that came up from the feedback was reorganisation. We got comments like "Need for a clear narrative" and "I'd like to see an obvious route", "wasn't sure where to go because its to chaotic" and "Reorganize in a 'timeline' way". Access and signage also had a high result, with people saying "signage and direction around the building is unclear", "Arrow/Maps needed" and "Poor accessibility thought main entrance"



Mapping and wayfinding



Movement



"Disability Inclusion - which deal accessibility into the museum with the right signage"

"Current Entry into the museum feels more like a back entrance, a better visible entry for the general public to identify"

WALK THIS WAY Signs all across town and within the museum

"Improve brand presence within the town and establish clarity on location of the museum and the mill"

"Visual Cohesion Between Museum and the mill" "Challenge existing functions and Promote Identifiers around town - Internal branding" have a better flow across galleries"

Re-organize rooms in a proper 'timeline' format"

"Clear spatial Narratives to ensure a positive visitor experience"

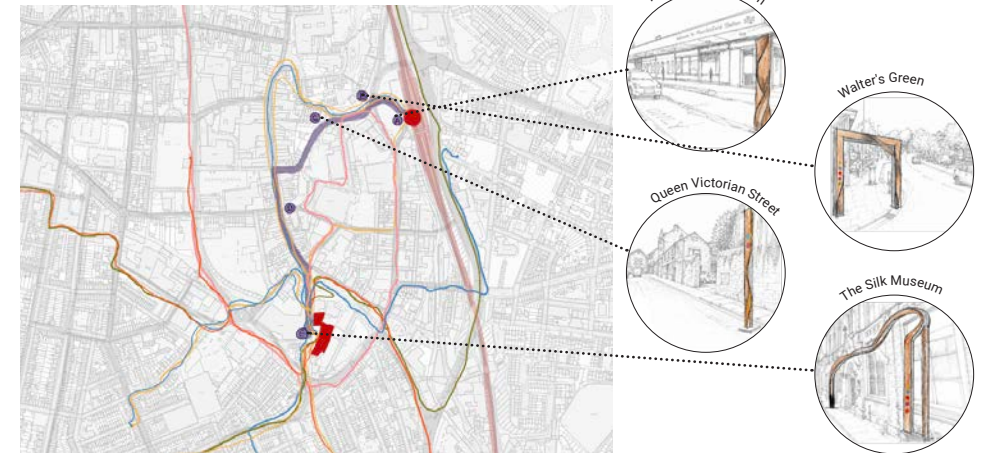
"Respond to Environmental and technical issues for more displays to be brought back into the museum from the back office."

Quotes from feedback

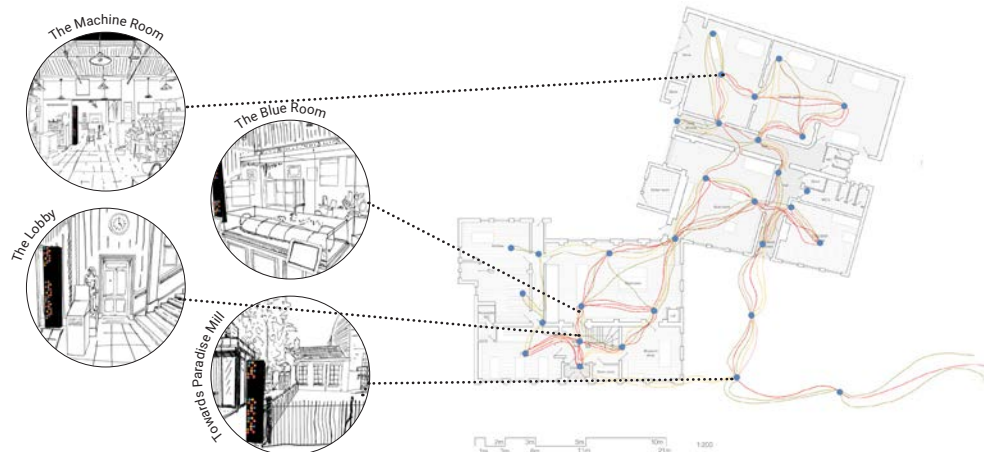
Signposting

These mapped movements from the engagement activity identified high-footfall moments across Macclesfield where the museum's presence is currently absent. The proposed signage interventions are placed directly at these intersections informed by how people already move ensuring each intervention is encountered where it matters most.

Beyond navigation, the strategy establishes a stronger brand presence for both sites across the town, extending the museum's identity outward into Macclesfield's urban fabric and positioning it as a destination that is not only worth finding, but impossible to miss.



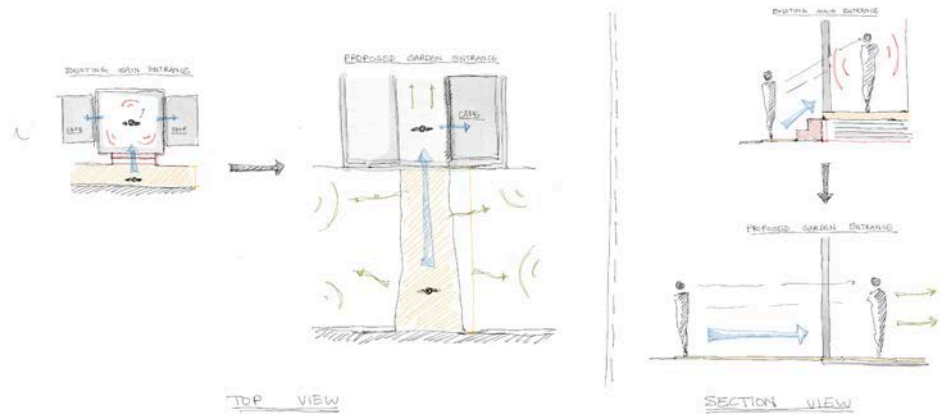
The interior signage for the Silk Museum was created by taking inspiration from the wayfinding by Blank Studio for the Silesian Museum in Southern Poland. It is clear and minimal as to not take away from the building and the exhibitions it contains. The Silk Museum's existing branding and its relation to Jacquard loom punch cards helped to inspire the pattern. Combining these two precedents, the post-like shape was created with the unmistakable coloured spots found throughout the museums branding. The posts are timber but have been charred to create a yakisugi effect. This helps them fit cohesively with the dark background of the branding and creates a larger contrast between the coloured spots and wood surface. The posts are engraved in white with icons that identify the room you are currently in and directions to other rooms and facilities.



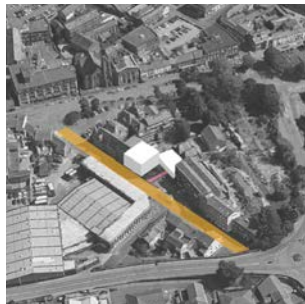
Access

There are two facade entrances that could serve as the main entry points into the building, both situated along the main street. Choosing between the two is important in setting the tone and establishing the visitor's first impression of the museum experience. The current one comes straight off the street in the building, while the other has a private garden pathway leading up towards the door, providing a more gradual and welcoming transition into the museum experience.

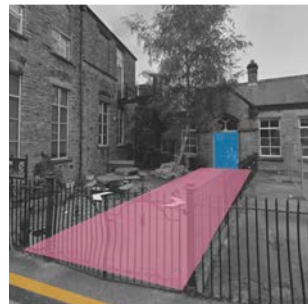
While evaluating the pros and cons of both entry points, it's important to examine what happens at the building's threshold. When entering the current entrance, you are faced with a narrow, dim room that doesn't allow for a transition between the outside and the museum, while the other already has the upper hand transition-wise by having the pathway, but upon entrance, the visitors are presented with a larger hallway and cafe to the left. When choosing between the two, the second one is stronger at allowing a smooth transition into the building and at creating a more open space, making for a more welcoming first impression than the current entrance point. Swapping the two in a simple change, but has a strong impact on the arrival journey to the building and changes positively impact the internal layout.



Current Entrance



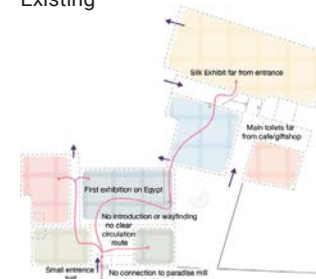
Garden Entrance



Spatial Reorganisation

The museum's current spatial organisation presents significant challenges to visitor orientation and experience. The main entrance opens directly from the street into a small, dim hallway with no welcome space, ticket desk or foyer, failing to provide the transitional threshold that a museum environment requires. This is compounded by the sequencing of the exhibitions beyond; visitors are immediately met with an Egyptian exhibition, creating a disconnect from the silk heritage the museum represents. The floor plan as a whole feels cluttered and difficult to read, with two separate entrances and exits generating competing circulation paths. Combined with feedback from our engagement day, the mapped visitor journey reveals a fragmented, back-and-forth movement between rooms with no clear narrative thread.

Existing

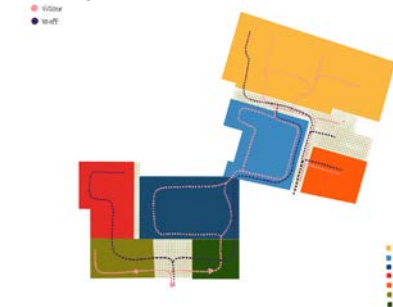


Proposed

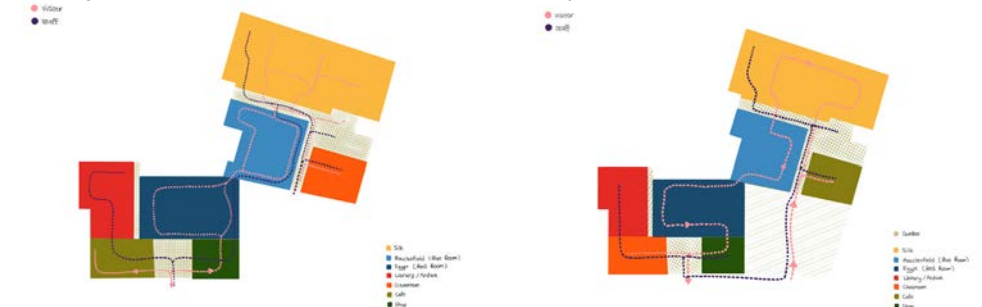


Our proposed interventions address these issues through a series of considered, non-invasive changes. The main entrance is relocated to better connect with Paradise Mills, and is accompanied by a repositioned café establishing the transitional welcome space the current entrance lacks. The café and classroom spaces are swapped, placing the classroom at the end of the visitor sequence and next to the library where it more naturally supports the workshops, craft sessions and school trips that typically follow a tour. The first exhibition encountered is now a silk and historical one, immediately establishing the museum's identity and creating a coherent narrative that carries the visitor through the building.

Existing



Proposed

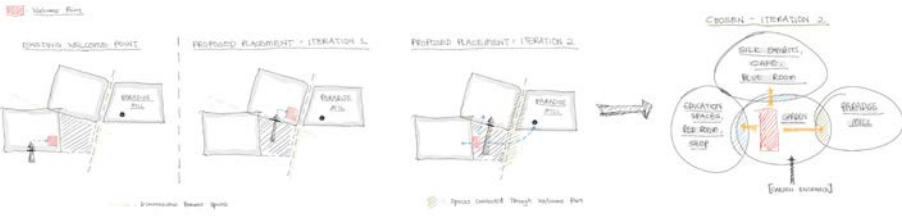
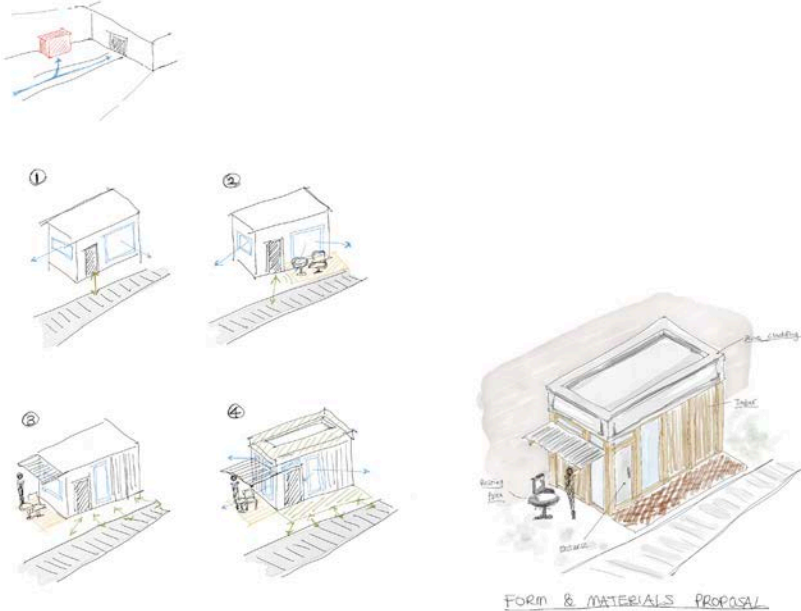


Design Development

The existing welcome point sits inside the café adjacent to the main road entrance, spatially disconnected from the wider museum and, critically, from Paradise Mill, which already suffers from low visitor awareness. Seeking to unite all areas of the museum under a single arrival point, we explored two possible locations.

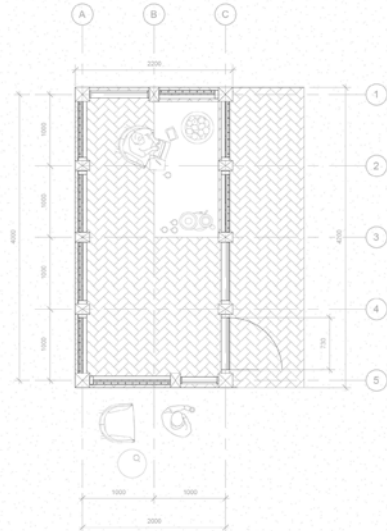
Iteration 1 positioned the Welcome Point within the relocated café space off the Garden Entrance corridor. Whilst convenient for visitors arriving via the main route, this location did not resolve the fundamental disconnect between the museum building and Paradise Mill.

Iteration 2 proposed an outdoor position within the garden, visible from both the museum and Paradise Mill and in close proximity to all areas of the site. This location offers immediate clarity on arrival, allowing visitors to orientate themselves, access information and locate the Paradise Mill tour from a single, legible point of contact. We therefore selected Iteration 2 as the basis for our proposed outdoor welcome pavilion, establishing it as the unifying threshold for the whole museum complex.

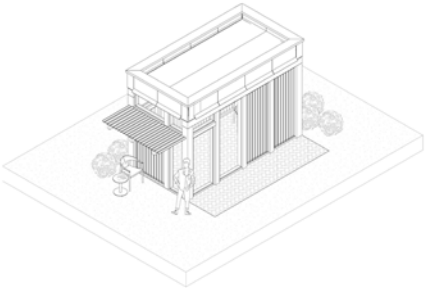


Proposed Pavilion

Welcome Pavilion Plan



Welcome Pavilion Axo



Welcome Pavilion Front Elevation



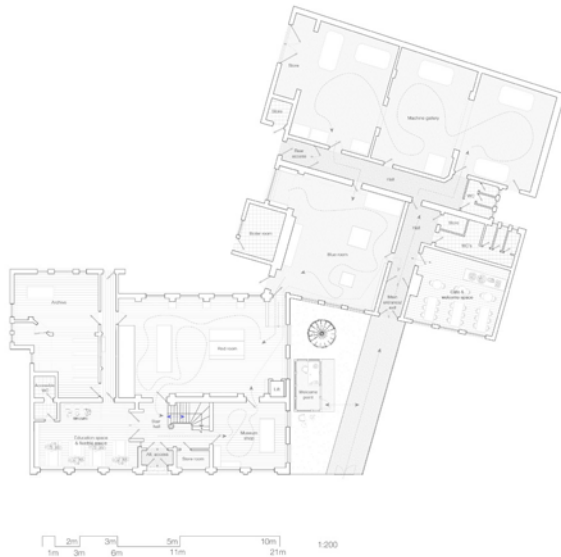
Proposed Plans

Our key proposal is swapping the cafe and education space. The cafe now sits adjacent to the level-access garden entrance, acting as the new main entrance, a welcoming space and information hub on arrival. The education space relocates next to the archive, away from the main visitor flow where it works better programmatically. Together these changes create a single clear route through the museum with no backtracking, ending naturally toward Paradise Mill

Existing Plan



Proposed Plan



Project Reflection

Over sixteen weeks, our vertical studio group, made up of BA1, MArch1 and MA Adaptive Reuse students, worked together on a proposal for the Grade II listed Silk Museum in Macclesfield, working with our collaborator throughout the process. We started by visiting the site, having met the collaborator the week prior. Alongside our public engagement work over the semester, this gave us a clear picture of where the challenges with the existing site and museum were. The issues centred around how people access the museum, spanning Part M compliance and inclusive access more broadly, as well as a general sense of an uninviting entrance. From there, the focus extended to how visitors move through the building intuitively and how they locate the museum within the town in the first place. Having students at different stages of their education in the same room was something that genuinely shaped how we worked. Conversations felt more open because of it, and the range of experience meant we could approach the listed building constraints with both curiosity and care. Our regular design team meetings helped in progressing the project and allowed us to stay connected rather than fragmented across the group. The proposal we arrived at tries to respond sensitively to the heritage context and what the museum actually needs, grounded in the collaborator's initial brief and expanded through what users shared with us during engagement. This felt like an informed place from which to form our proposals.



Proposed Render

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

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