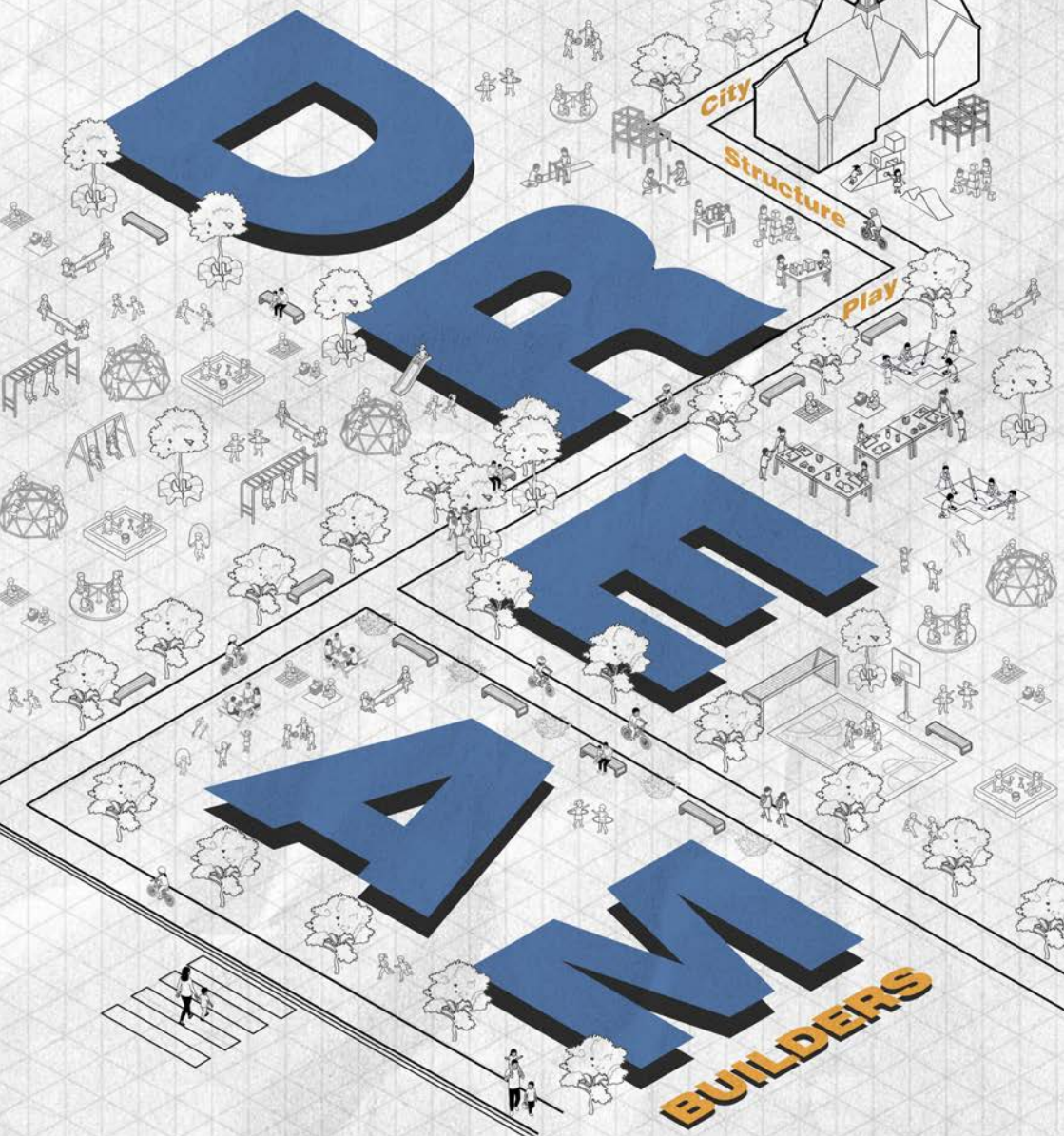


# MANCHESTER SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE



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Laura Sanderson

# MSA LIVE 26

## Team

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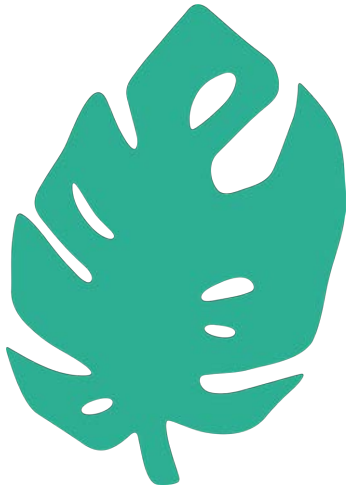
**Daria Restovanuk** (BA1)

**Elodie Boland** (BA1)

**Kenza Tazi** (BA1)

**Nadin El Rashidy** (BA1)

**Sabina Lacey** (BA1)



## Collaborators

This project was made possible by the generosity and involvement of a number of individuals and organisations, all of whom played an important part in its delivery.

Oswald Road Primary School made this work possible through its openness to hosting workshops with the Year 4 cohort, and the invaluable support of the teachers involved. We also want to recognise the pupils' creativity and enthusiasm and we hope their work will form a meaningful foundation for the proposed new pre-school and the redevelopment of the 'Owl Garden' playground.

Laura Sanderson, architect, educator, and founder of her own practice, served as Project Liaison throughout the project. Her guidance was invaluable at every stage, from shaping the workshop programme to delivering its outcomes, and her ability to connect the project team with the school ensured a smooth and considered process.

Claire Bandy, architect and principal of her own practice, is the lead architect for the wider development, and her involvement gave the project a direct link to the live design process. We hope the workshop findings, grounded in the pupils' genuine input, will meaningfully inform and enrich the design of the development.

The workshops were made possible through the financial support of B2PM Project Management and Cost Consultancy, based in Stretford, Manchester. Their contribution provided the resources needed to deliver the workshops in full, and reflects a real commitment to the success of the new pre-school development.

# Introduction

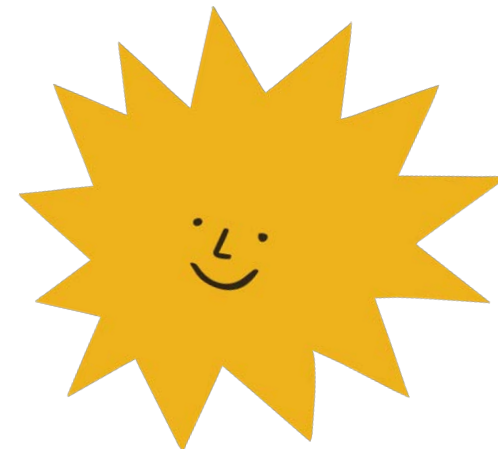


## Dream Builders

The Dream Builders MSA Live project, undertaken in collaboration with Laura Sanderson Architect and Claire Bandy Architect, delivered a design workshop at Oswald Road Primary School in Chorlton, Manchester. Working with a Year 4 cohort of 90 pupils across three classrooms, the project explored the use of co-participatory design principles, using the workshop as the foundation to gather pupils' input and creative contributions to inform a new pre-school extension and the redevelopment of the existing 'Owl Garden' playground at the school.

The project encompassed both the planning and delivery of the workshop, establishing it as a structured framework through which pupils' ideas could be meaningfully elicited and integrated into emerging design proposals. At the same time, the workshop had a strong educational focus, introducing pupils to the fundamentals of design literacy, the role of an architect, and the processes through which ideas are translated into built form.

Through this combination of co-participatory practice and design education, the project sought not only to cultivate architectural awareness among primary-age pupils but also to draw on their ideas and imagination as the basis for a more inclusive and holistic approach to the design of community spaces.



# Project Background



## Oswald Road Primary School

The project centres on the development of a new pre-school and the redevelopment of the existing 'Owl Garden' playground at Oswald Road Primary School in Chorlton, Manchester, with initial planning submitted in December 2025. As part of this wider process, we designed and delivered a series of workshops at the school to embed co-participatory design principles directly into the project development. Working with pupils, these sessions positioned their ideas as an active driver in shaping potential interventions for the Owl Garden redevelopment. The workshops were structured to draw out their creativity and insights through guided activities, ensuring their contributions could be meaningfully translated into spatial and design thinking. In this way, the sessions established a clear link between pupil input and the emerging design proposals, grounding the wider project in the perspectives of its primary users.

## Previous MSA Live Contributions

Our project built upon previous MSA Live workshops conducted with the school in 2024 and 2025, continuing pupil involvement in the design process as the pre-school proposals have progressed through successive design stages.

The Little Architects team in MSA Live 2024 ran a two-day workshop with 90 Year 4 pupils at Oswald Road Primary School, beginning with an urban sketching walk through Chorlton to introduce the children to their neighbourhood's architectural history. On the second day, the three classes split into Plan-it Pilots, Model Masters, and Elevation Explorers, redesigning a local corner of Chorlton marked for demolition, the school's playground, and its façade. The children's work was presented in an after-school exhibition for parents.

The Brick by Brick MSA Live 2025 team ran a day-and-a-half workshop with 90 Year 4 pupils at Oswald Road Primary School, introducing them to architectural practice through site visits, drawing exercises, and cardboard modelling. Pupils explored plan, section, and elevation by drawing their breakfasts, then applied these ideas to reimagine uses for the school's vacant caretaker's house. Their input was synthesised into a design proposal supporting the school's grant-funded redevelopment of the site.

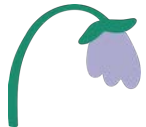
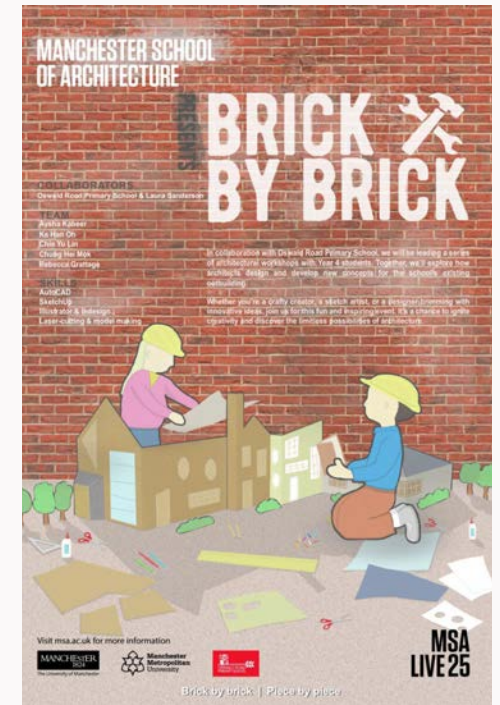
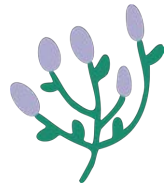


Image Top:  
Oswald Road Primary School (current site and area of study)

Image Bottom-Left:  
"Little Architects" MSA Live 2024 project.

Image Bottom-Right:  
"Brick by Brick" MSA Live 2025 project.

# Workshops Structure



## Play, Structure, City

The workshops were structured around three themes: 'Play', 'Structure', and 'City', each carefully developed to be accessible and engaging for the Year 4 pupils, whilst together forming a progression in scale from the small and immediate to the wider built context. Moving from micro to macro, the themes guided pupils through an expanding understanding of the built environment, beginning with the familiar elements of a playground, building toward the making and assembly of physical structures, and finally to the broader ideas of city, neighbourhood, and place-making within a wider urban context.

The theme of 'Play' engaged pupils directly with the Owl Garden redevelopment, asking them to consider what they value in outdoor space and what they would want from it. Rooted in the most immediate and familiar scale, this theme invited pupils to think not only about play equipment and activities, but also about the natural elements of a playground, including trees, plants, and the wildlife they support, reflecting the landscape ambitions of the wider design brief.

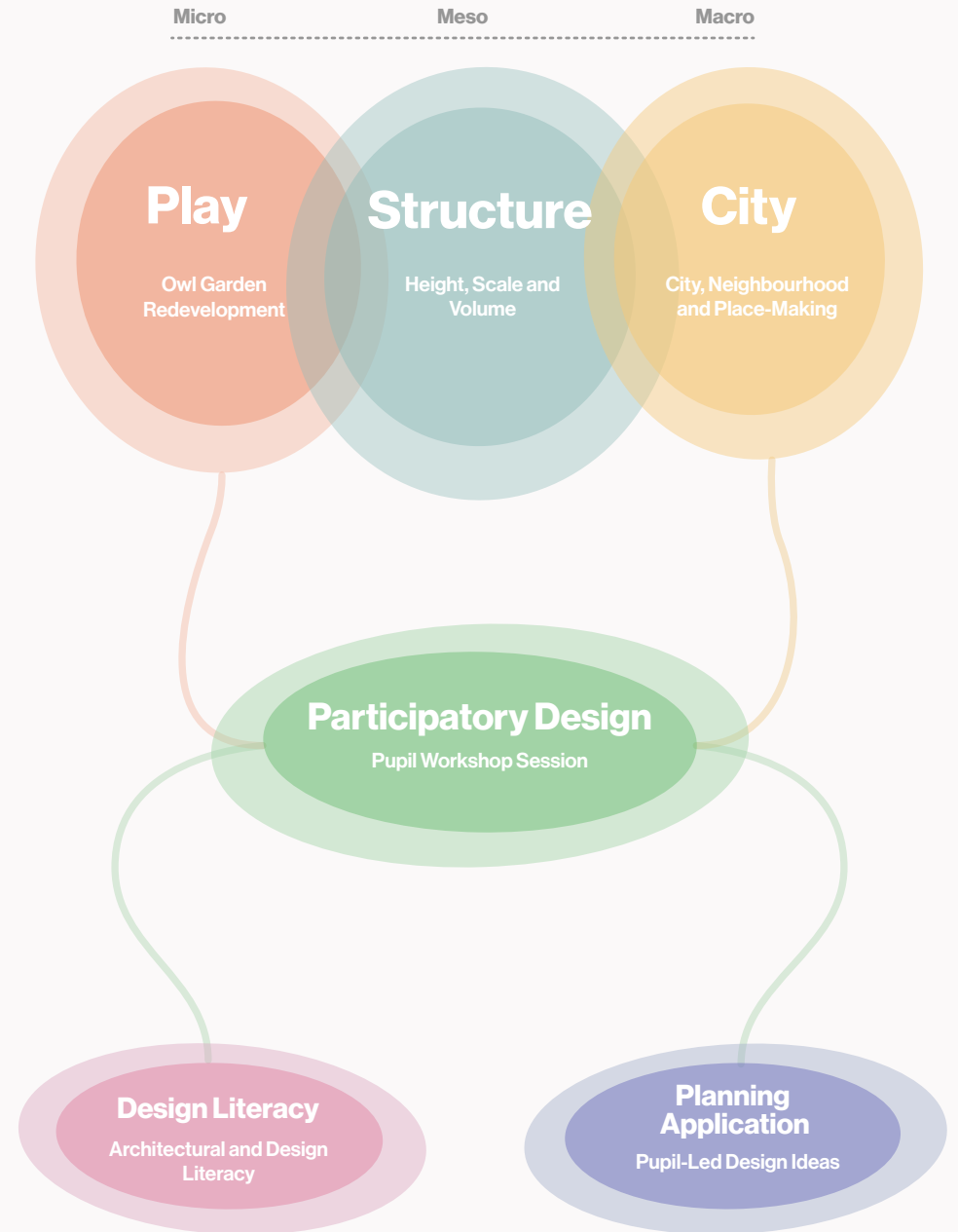
The theme of 'Structure' built directly on the previous activity, taking the playground elements pupils had been thinking about and translating them into three-dimensional form. By physically modelling individual structures, pupils began to engage with questions of height, scale, and volume, developing a more hands-on understanding of how design ideas move from the page into physical space.

The theme of 'City' widened the frame further, positioning the school within its wider urban context and prompting pupils to think about how different spaces and buildings come together to create the places we live in. Working collectively, pupils began to understand how individual design decisions contribute to something larger than themselves.

Taken together, the three themes functioned as a single participatory design session with outcomes operating to achieve two primary goals. The first is design literacy, giving pupils a working understanding of architectural thinking grounded in their own everyday environment. The second is direct contribution to the planning application, with the ideas and preferences generated across the session forming a genuine body of pupil-led design thinking that underpins the Owl Garden redevelopment proposal.



Image:  
The workshop themes,  
exploration of scale and  
desired outcomes.



# 1. Playground

## Brief

The first activity asked pupils to design their own playground using cutout images of play equipment and natural elements, arranged onto a bird's-eye view of Longford Park, with felt-tips available to draw in anything additional. Rooted directly in the Owl Garden redevelopment, the activity introduced pupils to the idea of the playground as something that can be actively designed and shaped by the people who use it.

## Workshop Results

The completed layouts showed a consistent interest in both active play and natural elements, with most pupils incorporating trees and planting alongside conventional equipment such as swings, slides, and climbing frames. Several demonstrated a clear spatial awareness in how they grouped and arranged elements, showing an instinctive grasp of zoning without being prompted. One pupil extended the brief entirely, producing a written proposal complete with a stadium, café, and ice cream van. Across all three classrooms, the outputs pointed toward a shared desire for a varied, nature-rich outdoor environment, offering a meaningful indication of the qualities pupils most value in the spaces they use.



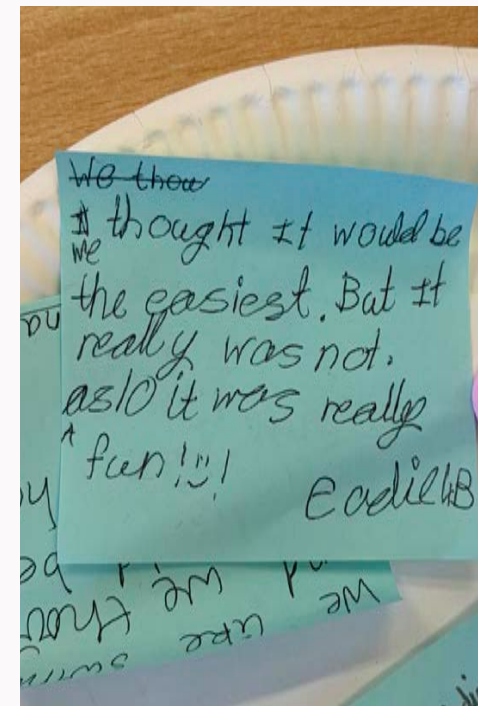
## 2. Structures

### Brief

The second activity asked pupils to select a single playground element and construct it as a three-dimensional model using straws, pipe cleaners and Play-Doh, before writing a sticky note explaining what they had made and why. Moving from the flat layout of the previous task into physical form, the activity introduced questions of height, scale, and structure.

### Workshop Results

The pupils built a wide range of structures, from climbing frames and monkey bars to swings and more imaginative hybrid forms. Many chose their element believing it would be straightforward to construct, only to find the process more challenging than anticipated. This friction between intention and making proved instructive, requiring pupils to think carefully about how structures are held together and how a design idea changes when it has to exist in three dimensions. The activity demonstrated that physical, material-based making is a particularly effective way of engaging young people in design thinking, drawing out a level of considered response that more passive exercises might not.



### 3. City

#### Brief

The third activity asked pupils to work in small groups, each assigned a different building type, to construct from recycled materials brought from home, adding printed doors, windows, and other craft materials. Each group then placed their building onto a shared city map, forming a single collective model that introduced pupils to the idea of the city as something made up of many different spaces, each with its own purpose and relationship to the whole.

#### Workshop Results

The resulting models were varied and inventive, reflecting pupils' own experiences of the places they inhabit. The collective assembly of the shared map was a particularly effective moment, making visible how individual decisions accumulate into a shared environment and how the choices of one group affect the space around them. Several groups labelled their structures carefully and considered placement thoughtfully, engaging seriously with the idea that buildings have a purpose and a relationship to their surroundings. The activity demonstrated that pupils understand the city not as a fixed backdrop, but as something shaped by the people within it, a perspective directly relevant to the participatory ambitions of the wider project.



# Spatial Translation

## Branching Learning Landscape: An architectural interpretation of pupils' workshop outputs

The proposal is shaped directly by the pupils' creative responses during the workshops, which revealed a shared desire for outdoor space that brings together active play, natural elements, and areas for social gathering. From this, the central concept emerged: a "Branching Learning Landscape" inspired by the organic form of tree branches extending outward from the school building, creating organic routes that connect different learning and play zones across the site. Each circular activity space acts as a leaf on the branch, offering a distinct experience while remaining part of one connected landscape. Together, the zones support a range of activities including outdoor learning, sensory play, movement, and ecological awareness, with the overall layout reflecting the pupils' instinct that outdoor space should feel exploratory rather than prescriptive.

Physical making proved the most generative mode of engagement throughout the workshops. The straw structures exercise produced a quality of thinking that a drawing-based task would not have prompted, with the friction between pupils' intentions and the actual difficulty of building being precisely where the most meaningful design thinking occurred. The progression across micro, meso, and macro scales held together well in practice, with each activity building on the last. The most significant moment came when individual city pieces were assembled onto a shared map and pupils visibly registered that their decisions were shaping a space that affected everyone around them, not just themselves.

What this process demonstrated is that the difference between acknowledging the value of children's input and constructing a process in which that input genuinely matters is considerable. The presence of a real brief, a real site, and practitioners who would act on the outcomes fundamentally changed how pupils engaged. They were not simulating design; they were doing it, and they understood that. The key takeaway for practice is that co-participatory design is most effective when it is honest about what it actually needs from participants. The most useful ideas emerged when pupils were given just enough structure to articulate what they already instinctively understood about space, and that principle feels worth carrying forward well beyond this project.



Image Top:  
Landscape Plan

Image Bottom-Left:  
Visualisation Looking  
Towards Pre-School

Image Bottom-Right:  
Visualisation From  
Playground



## 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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