

**MANCHESTER SCHOOL  
OF ARCHITECTURE**

# STORY WORKS!



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**MSA  
LIVE 26**

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## Collaborators

Manchester City of Literature is an independent charity that works with organisations across the city including libraries, writers and publishers. They aim to change lives through nurturing the diverse voices of their partners, celebrating the creative talent in their industries.

By connecting and uniting the voices of writers they create distinctive, inclusive and innovative literary experiences that make Manchester a UNESCO city of literature. The charity advocates for new and established writers by promoting opportunities at every level and for an abundance of different sectors such as poetry, novels, plays and comic books. It is important that literature is seen as more than just books.

Ivan Wadeson is the executive director at Manchester City of Literature and has communicated what is next for the charity.

# Introduction

## Campfield Literature Hub

Located within Campfield, the site is a transformed historic market district into the Manchester's campus for technology, media, and creative industries. It embodies a meeting point between heritage and innovation, as its retrofitted halls supports new forms of creative production where ideas can be explored, tested, and shared.

This project is developed for Manchester City of Literature, an organisation committed to strengthening the city's literary ecosystem by supporting writers, widening access to reading, and foster creative exchange across communities. Led by Ivan Wadeson and recognised as part of UNESCO's Creative Cities Network, they position Manchester as a place where literature is not only celebrated but produced. They pursue to establish a dedicated space for the writers they that enables focused work, collaboration, and meaningful engagement with the public.

STORYWORKS builds upon these ambitions by introducing a literary hub into Campfield's wider creative environment. The project embeds writing and storytelling within a heritage environment, extending the site's legacy as a place where new narratives emerge. At the same time, it provides a rare and much needed space for writers to thrive in the heart of the city, while opening literary culture to a broader audience.

Conceived as a continuous cycle of activity, STORYWORKS adapts to the everchanging need of users. It transforms between quiet concentrated writing environments and open spaces for public interaction, with the flexibility for both to coexist when needed. At its core, the project prioritises accessibility and adaptability, supporting the solitary nature of writing as well as the communal experiences that bring stories to life. As Manchester's new Literature Hub, STORYWORKS aims to nurture writers while offering a civic space where stories can be discovered, shared, and celebrated.

# Opening Chapter

## First impressions

Our team consisted of MArch 1, BA 1, and MLA students, so we entered the first meeting knowing very little about one another. To break the ice, we introduced ourselves individually to the group to learn each other's names. We then split into smaller groups to discuss why we chose to study architecture and what aspects of the discipline interest us most.

Our first tasks involved starting the blog and designing the poster for the project, meaning that dividing the workload became our first challenge as a team. To approach this, we discussed our individual strengths and weaknesses in areas such as writing and graphic design. Based on these discussions, we allocated tasks according to the skills each member felt best suited to, resulting in balanced groups for both the poster and blog work. We also appointed one team member as the main communicator for the group.

Our next task was to prepare questions for our initial meeting with the collaborator. We prioritised gaining a better understanding of both the collaborator and the project brief so that we could eventually begin planning and budgeting effectively.

## Initial meeting with collaborator

During our first meeting with Ivan Wadeson and John McAuliffe from Manchester City of Literature, the project brief became much clearer. Ivan and John arrived with a short presentation outlining their ideas and expectations for the project. Manchester City of Literature expressed an interest in creating a flexible reading and writers' room, potentially located in Campfield, where mornings would be dedicated to writers, afternoons to reading and evenings to events such as book launches and talks.

They emphasised the creative freedom they wanted us to have while developing the design proposal. They also shared precedents that they particularly admired, including the Vodnik Homestead in Ljubljana.

## Response to brief

Following the meeting, we developed a much stronger understanding of what the design project would involve. As the site was an existing space, the majority of the design work would focus on the interior and furniture elements. Our response was to delay beginning the design process until after visiting the site, as the space appeared constrained and limited. We wanted to gain a clearer understanding of the dimensions and spatial conditions before moving forward with design proposals.



Image Top:  
The team in our first session

Image Middle-Left:  
First site visit with Ivan

Image Bottom:  
Our first meeting with Ivan from MCoL

Image Bottom-Right:  
Render of final design proposal

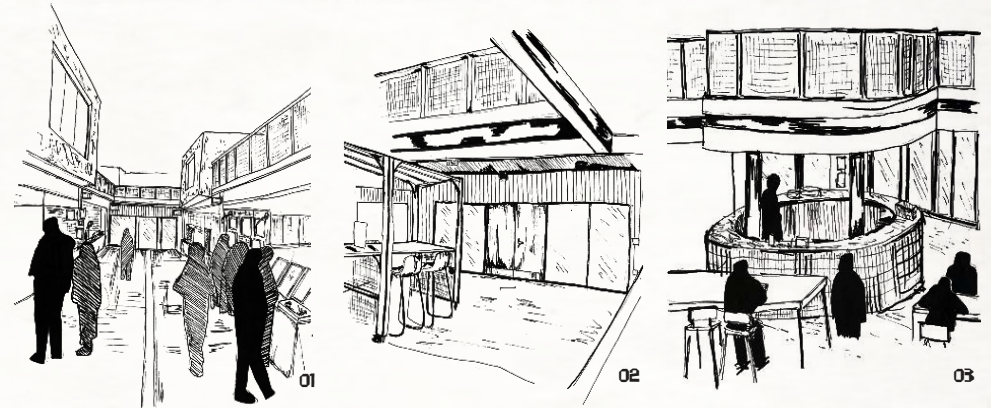
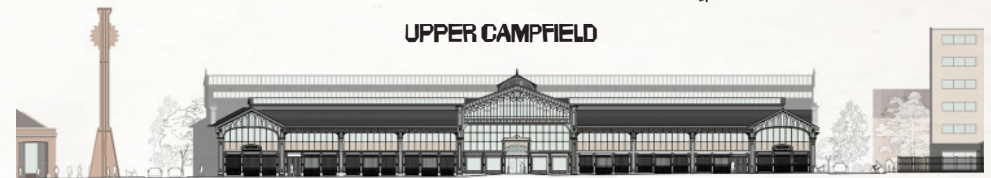
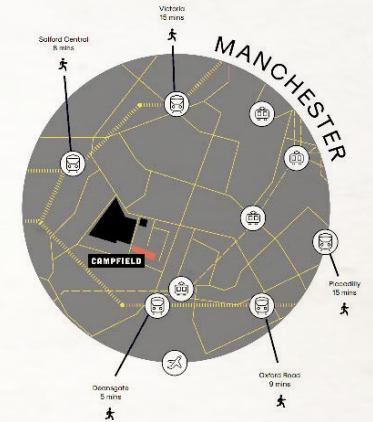
# Setting the Scene

## Meeting collaborators on site

In the week following our initial meeting with our partners we trekked to Campfield to reconvene with Ivan and a colleague of his, Hawwa, whilst being in the environment that we would eventually start designing for. This trip helped to visualize the kind of spaces our collaborators had envisioned in its context. We discussed some more ideas for the design and then took a closer look at the area of the site.

Located in the centre of Manchester, Campfield is a "next-generation camp for technology, and creative industries, built to accelerate innovation, fuel business growth, and tackle global challenges". The building has served as a hub for locals for 140 years having held wartime factories, museums, trading floors and exhibitions. Originally, Campfield was split into two market halls, Upper and Lower Campfield, however today Lower Campfield is the location of the Science and Industry Museum and Upper Campfield is where our site is located which is now open for social gatherings, office/work spaces and weekend markets.

Our site is located in a designated unit on the ground floor just off from the main lobby and cafe. It is a small rectangular area with only one window at the back of the room. Currently the walls are plain, the ceiling is industrial with long hanging lights and the floor is carpeted.



Sketch 1:  
Observation of Campfield Markets

Sketch 2:  
Observation of dedicated unit

Sketch 3:  
Observation of cafe in Campfield

Image Top-Left:  
Map of Manchester city centre

Image Top-Right:  
Map of Campfield's location

Image Middle:  
Front elevation of Campfield

Image Bottom:  
Access plan of Campfield and unit



# Narratives in Conversation

## Engagement planning

When planning our engagement activity, we developed two methods for gathering insight from writers. The first approach prioritised open ended expression, allowing each author to respond freely according to their own creative instincts and preferences. Rather than offering predefined options, we designed a deliberately vague questionnaire that encouraged writers to interpret the prompts in their own way, resulting in a more genuine understanding of the spaces they feel they need, rather than steering them toward a predetermined mould. The second method introduced a set of constraints focused on specific spatial parameters, particularly those relevant to the layout of the site. Given the tight footprint and the shared nature of the Campfield environment, this structured exercise helped us identify practical requirements and spatial priorities within the limits of the existing context. Together, these two methods allowed us to balance creative freedom with architectural feasibility, ensuring that the voices of writers remained central while still addressing the realities of the site.

## Meeting Authors

Meeting the authors was an unexpectedly energising experience. Their enthusiasm immediately set a positive tone, and they articulated their thoughts with a clarity and generosity that went far beyond what we anticipated. While each writer offered valuable insight into what supports their creative practice, what surprised us most was the extent to which their preferences diverged from one another. It became clear that, although the space is designed for a specific community of writers, it cannot be tailored to every individual in the same way. This realisation highlighted the importance of customisability, the need for a personal environment that each writer can adapt to feel comfortable and creatively. At the same time, the conversations revealed that productivity and comfort extend beyond spatial qualities alone as they are also shaped by systems of support outside designer's control. In response to this, we also propose a complementary system that works alongside the spatial concept, ensuring that the environment supports not only where writers work, but how they work.

Image Top:  
Handing out activity sheets  
and consent forms

Image Middle:  
Writers discussing prompts

Image Bottom:  
Writers discussing the  
potential site

## Engagement outcomes

I CAN WRITE WHEN... THERE IS NOT TOO MUCH QUIET.  
I HAVE SPACE TO SPREAD OUT.  
I FEEL FOCUSED / FREE FROM DISTRACTION.

I can write when... I feel relaxed, it's quiet and  
I can get in the zone / focus & feel  
inspired... I love that.

- Free to explore = walk
- around, stand up,
- open a window
- Basic logistics  
(Hot drinks, bin bag)
- A space that is  
open after hours!

You can find your  
spot that you want to  
return to.

quiet  
dedicated (to writers)  
I can see outside  
through the windows

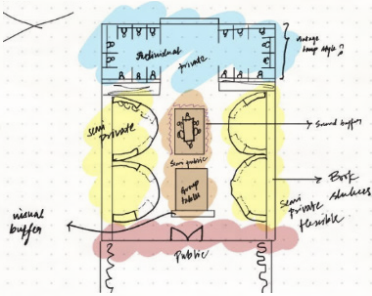
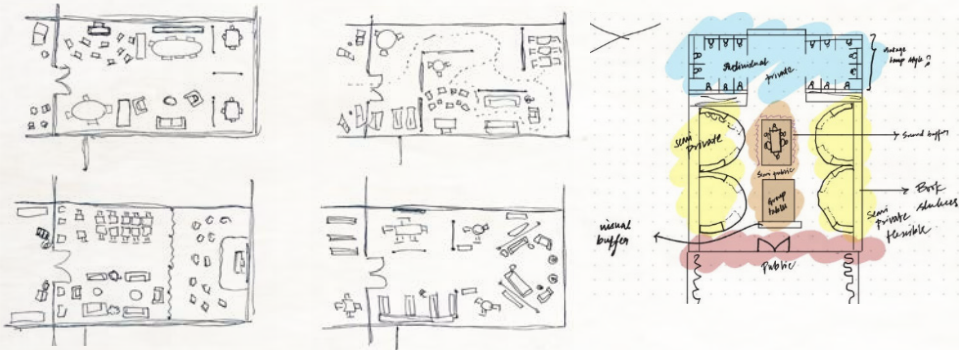
No loud  
distractions.  
I feel comfort  
table, warm  
know!  
have time.



# Drafting the Design

## Development

From the engagement activity, we identified the features most desired by the writers, including preferred seating arrangements, spatial layouts, and the overall atmosphere they find most productive to work in. A key aspect of the brief was the need for the space to remain flexible, allowing it to accommodate a variety of events in addition to everyday writing activities. As a result, adaptable and modular furniture became an essential consideration within the design process. The following studies and design ideas reflect the insights gathered from both the engagement activity and our wider research.



# Our Proposal

## A space for literature

The design proposal for Manchester City of Literature's writing and reading room at Campfield creates an inspiring, comfortable, and authentic space shaped by the real experiences of its users. Designed with a warm and intimate atmosphere, the space offers writers flexibility in terms of privacy, spatial arrangement, and lighting through a series of adaptable design interventions. These include curtains that can divide writing areas, movable furniture, and bespoke lighting features.

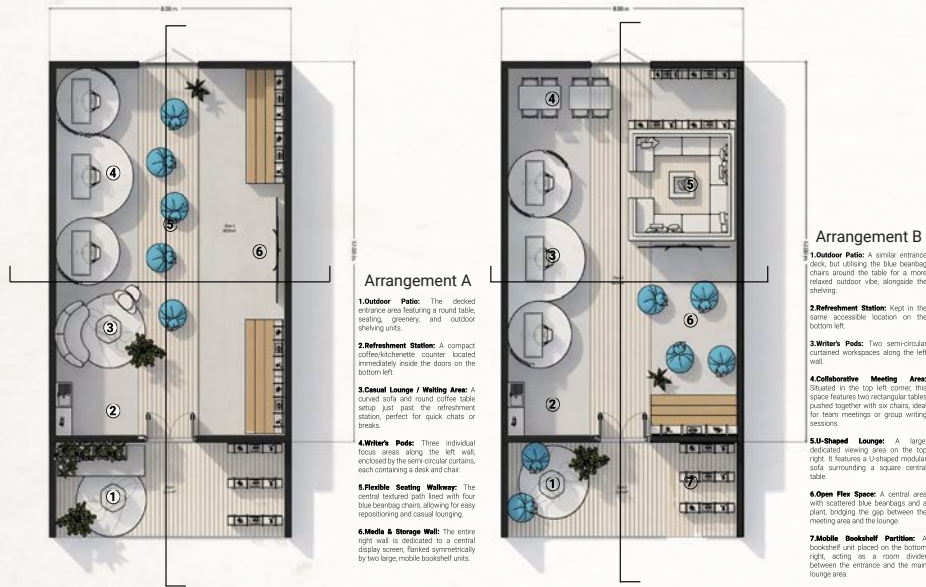
Feedback gathered from writers highlighted a range of working preferences: some valued complete privacy and minimal distraction, while others found inspiration in observing the activity around them. In response, the design accommodates both modes of working, creating a flexible environment that supports concentration as well as social engagement.



# Composing the Details

## Technical drawings

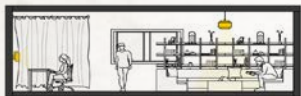
The two plans are iterations of how the furniture could be arranged differently for the types of activities and events our collaborator intends to hold. It was important, to the collaborator, that there was a screen in the room for talks and presentation type events.



Arrangement A



Arrangement B



## Furniture design

Something we noticed in our engagement activity was the excitement from the writers about having multiple areas within one space. To help incorporate this as a key feature in our design, we decided to have unique modular bookshelves that have multiple functions inside and outside our space. This then developed into the idea and potential for one of the functions to be a book swap which utilises the location of the City of Literature Hub. These bookshelves can function as a stall within Campfield Market each week; this will then advertise and gain recognition for Manchester as a City of Literature.

Having the larger modules on wheels and the smaller modules stackable allows the modules to work together and move around to form a complete bookshelf. This flexible design means it can be used to display books and plants inside but also can be used for the book swap outside the space. Each module can also be pulled away to function individually with smaller ones acting as stools and larger ones as table extenders.

Ceramic planters are selected for individual pots because they provide a clean, high-quality indoor finish and are easy to maintain. Decorative woven planter covers can be added to create a warmer and more styled appearance, helping the planting arrangement match the furniture design.

Timber-clad planters are used for the planting pots combined with seating. The timber finish creates a warmer and softer atmosphere, helping the seating area feel more comfortable and natural. A waterproof liner should be added inside the planter to protect the timber and control moisture.



# The Atmosphere



## Future of literature spaces

The Campfield site was identified only as a potential location for Manchester City of Literature, meaning the proposal could eventually be adapted and implemented within similar spaces across Manchester. As a result, the design should be understood as a conceptual proposal for a writers' and reading room rather than a site-specific intervention.

The project was primarily shaped by the experiences, habits and preferences of its users, as revealed through the engagement activity, rather than being solely driven by the immediate site context. Due to its modular and flexible nature, the design has the potential to be adapted to a variety of rectangular spaces while maintaining the same spatial qualities and user-focused approach.



# Reflection

Throughout our action week and the previous week's meetings there has been a chance to reflect on how we've worked as a team and with the client to complete our project but also how this has impacted and influenced our designs.

Understanding client and brief: In our first meeting we individually read the brief before discussing as a group what we understood from it. There were conflicting ideas but an overall response of confusion on what were the required outputs and purpose for the project. However, this allowed us to draw questions from our brief and fully utilise our meeting with the collaborator where we determined what they really wanted for the space. This helped prompt our continued communication with the collaborator throughout our process, keeping us on track with their vision. It also meant the collaborator stayed up to date and engaged with our project.

Managing expectations: Throughout this project we've had to manage expectations whether it's what the client is expecting from us or what we're expecting from each other in the group. When it came to managing expectations with the client, it was important to manage them professionally and politely. In the first meeting with the client, we discussed the vague brief we'd been given which had no site and minimal information on the expected outputs. When discussing this we realised there was no limit to what they wanted and with only four full days in our action week we had to give them a realistic view on what we'd be able to complete. From this meeting we established the expectations when they requested a physical model of the space, we then communicated our view that with the site not being definite, the visuals of the space and how it worked would display our ideas better and this was doable in our time frame.

With a mixed group of MArch1 and BA1 students it was again important to manage expectations when completing tasks. Through communication when dividing up tasks we realised as a group, we had a wide range of skill sets from hand sketching to digital 3D modelling, being aware of this meant we could play to everyone's strengths and complete the project to the highest standard we could. It also meant we could learn new skills from each other, for example having a group of people working on the digital model instead of just an individual meant skills could be shared and taught to students within the group.



## 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](mailto:e.crompton@mmu.ac.uk) and [j.fitzpatrick@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:j.fitzpatrick@mmu.ac.uk)**

## BLOG

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