

MANCHESTER SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

Liverpool's Hidden Heritage

Brunswick Half Tide Dock is a forgotten threshold on Liverpool's waterfront, holding extraordinary 1832 heritage: two Grade II Hartley Huts and a concealed underground toilet complex. Developed with Canal & River Trust, this project proposes a heritage-first, climate-resilient masterplan that turns the site into a new public destination. The octagonal huts become micro-pavilions for interpretation, volunteering, and fundraising, while a nature-led landscape strategy boosts biodiversity and elevates the public realm. The scheme stitches the quieter Riverside Walkway back to the energy of Albert Dock, shaped through co-design and partner collaboration to create a new waterfront "special moment."

HARTLEY HUTTERS



Team Members

Wan Yee Shuk, Shadi Salams, Kai Thornton, Yiran Huang, Yiran Zhang, Meenah Fawzi, Ziad Amr, Yaha Ahmed, Kandaki, Marcus White, Hannah Turnick, Angelina Korrich, Afra Tasnim

Visit msa.ac.uk for more information



**MSA
LIVE 26**

Team

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- Veena Tawfik (FDN)
- Dyanesh Shanmugaraj (MLA)



Collaborators



We are working with the Canal & River Trust, the UK's largest canal charity and long-term custodian of over 2,000 miles of canals and navigable rivers. Their work extends beyond waterway maintenance, involving the protection of historic infrastructure, ecological care, public access and the long-term stewardship of places that connect communities to water.

The Trust's responsibilities are increasingly shaped by the pressures placed on ageing waterway infrastructure. Canals, locks, bridges, towpaths, reservoirs and dockside structures require continual care, particularly as climate change and extreme weather accelerate material decline. Within this context, conservation is not only about preserving the past, but about keeping these spaces resilient, accessible and meaningful for future public use.

Our project sits directly within this wider responsibility. At the former Brunswick Half Tide Dock entrance, two Grade II listed Hartley Huts and two hidden underground toilets, all dating from 1832, occupy a quieter stretch of Liverpool's Riverside Walkway. For the Canal & River Trust, the site presents a complex opportunity: to protect fragile maritime heritage while making it more visible, engaging and socially useful.

Their brief asks us to consider how the site can support biodiversity, volunteer activity, fundraising, heritage interpretation and public engagement without compromising its historic character. This creates the central challenge of the project: balancing stewardship and activation. Our role is to help the Trust imagine how a small, overlooked heritage site can become a lasting civic asset, rooted in its dockside history while opening itself to new forms of public life.

Introduction



Hartley Hutters

Hartley Hutters is our response to the former Brunswick Half Tide Dock entrance on Liverpool's Riverside Walkway. The project reimagines two Grade II listed Hartley Huts and two hidden underground toilets, all dating from 1832, as part of a wider architectural and landscape strategy for a quieter but historically significant stretch of the waterfront. Although the site sits close to Albert Dock and the wider movement of Liverpool's waterfront, it currently feels partially overlooked. Its heritage is present, but not fully legible; its structures are visible, but not meaningfully activated; its public realm is accessible, but lacks a clear reason to pause. This contradiction became the starting point for our proposal.

Rather than treating the Hartley Huts as isolated heritage objects, we approached them as small but potent anchors within a wider public landscape. Their octagonal form, limited internal wall space and listed status resist conventional reuse, requiring an approach based on careful adaptation rather than heavy occupation. The challenge is not simply to insert a new programme, but to choreograph how people encounter, interpret and move through the site. Our proposal is shaped by the tension between conservation and activation. Through landscape, architecture and interpretation, we explore how the site can support public activity, volunteer use, biodiversity, seating, signage, activity routes and heritage storytelling. The hidden underground toilets introduce a second layer of history, prompting us to consider how inaccessible heritage can be made present through digital modelling, physical markers or narrative devices.

The project aims to reframe this part of Liverpool's waterfront as a "special moment" within the public realm: a place to pause, gather, learn and reconnect with the dock's overlooked histories. Our final outputs use architectural drawings, visual material and computer-generated models to communicate a proposal that is sensitive to heritage, specific to the collaborator and ambitious in its public value.



FROM DISCOVERY TO RESOLUTION

February 2026

Our journey began with team building and an inspiring site visit to Albert Dock. Observing the vibrant runners but lacking inviting pause spaces sparked our initial idea: reintroducing pause and engagement to this heritage waterfront in collaboration with the Canal & River Trust.

Discovery & Site Exploration

The Hartley Hutters
Series 1

- During the team building activity...
- During the site visit, observing the vibrant runners but lacking inviting pause spaces...
- During the group discussion, exploring various ideas for reintroducing pause and engagement...
- Working with the Canal & River Trust...

The Hartley Hutters
Site Visit 2

- The team gathered to discuss the site's sensitivity...
- Director views drawing existing structure and structure...
- Team with collaboration with the city...

The Hartley Hutters
Session 1

- Macro planning and existing site...
- Final design drawing for the site...

Heritage Analysis & Initial 3D Modeling

March 2026

Gaining rare access to the Grade II listed Hartley Huts deepened our understanding of the site's sensitivity. BA1 students actively explored ideas through sketching and gathering reference images. Concurrently, we began initial 3D modeling to translate these collective insights into spatial concepts, drafting accessible ramps and seating areas.

2nd Client Meeting & Scheme Refinement

April 2026

We presented our initial digital 3D models and site plans in the 1st Client Meeting! Taking the client's valuable feedback on board, we rigorously refined our macro site strategy. We focused on testing the scale of our proposed natural amphitheatre and interventions to ensure they seamlessly blend with the dock's historic atmosphere.

Final Interventions & Resolution

May 2026

A major breakthrough after the 2nd Client Meeting! We assigned specific programs to the 4 huts (Listening, Letter, Route, Notice) and designed an innovative perforated metal facade featuring Jesse Hartley's image—acting as both compelling historical storytelling and a secure filter.

3rd Client Meeting



FEEDBACK-LED DESIGN PROCESS

Our proposal developed through two site visits and three client meetings, allowing the design to be tested against the site's physical conditions, the collaborator's ambitions and the wider waterfront context. The site visits reframed the Hartley Huts as more than isolated heritage objects. Their position along the Riverside Walkway, relationship to the dock edge, exposure to weather and connection to the hidden Victorian toilets revealed a condition of underused heritage within an active public route.

Through consultation with the Canal & River Trust and Donald Insall Associates, the project was refined around public engagement, guided interpretation, biodiversity, volunteer activity, long-term care, heritage sensitivity and reversibility. This shifted the proposal beyond restoration, positioning the huts, toilets and landscape as part of a connected public realm strategy.

As a result, the project evolved into a curated waterfront experience: revealing the Victorian toilets, embedding storytelling into the landscape, and transforming a pass-through edge into a meaningful public pause.



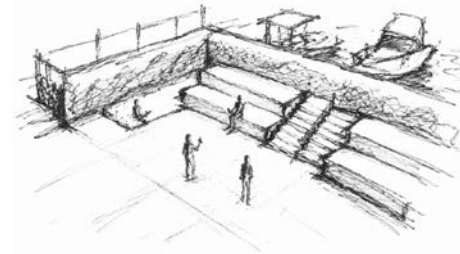
HISTORIC SITE CONTEXT

Brunswick Half-Tide Dock, located along Liverpool's southern waterfront, forms part of the city's historic dock system and sits close to Brunswick Dock and the River Mersey. Due to its exposed waterfront position, the site is strongly affected by wind, particularly from the south-west, which is the prevailing wind direction in Liverpool. Open water and long dock edges can increase wind speed, making parts of the site feel cold and exposed. Sheltered areas should therefore be created through planting, walls or built form.

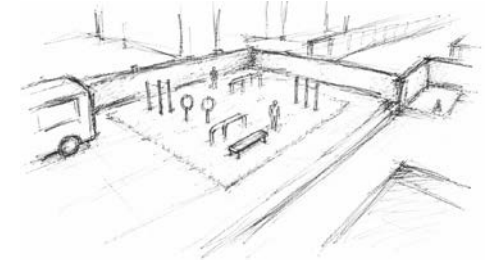
The sun path moves across the southern side of the site, meaning south-facing and south-west-facing areas receive the most sunlight. These spaces are best suited for seating, gathering and public activity, while north-facing areas may feel shaded and cooler.

Access to the site is mainly supported by the Liverpool waterfront route. Pedestrians can approach from the city centre, Royal Albert Dock and the wider dock network, making Brunswick Half-Tide Dock part of a larger waterfront journey. Its position gives it potential to become a stronger public connection between Liverpool's historic docks and the Mersey edge.

INITIAL SITE PROPOSAL SKETCHES



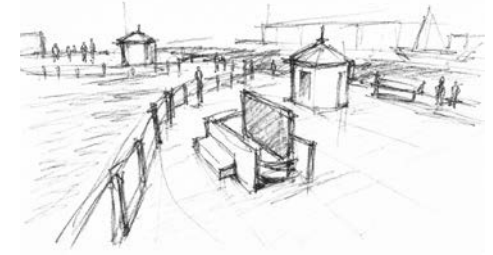
Amphitheatre Seating



Outdoor Gym



Waterfront Activity



Heritage Toilet Access

ARTISTIC HERITAGE ASSETS SPECIFIC TO SITE



Jesse Hartley (Original Architect)



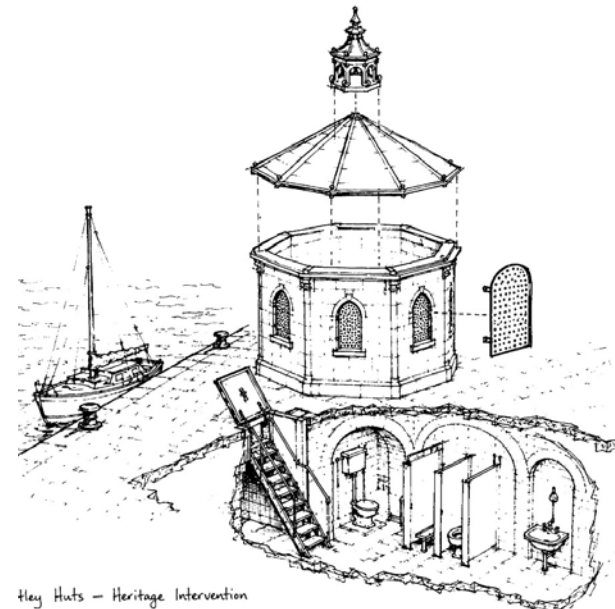
Historic Brunswick Map



Historic Corvettes

INITIAL IDEAS ON HERITAGE VISION

Initial design discussions focused on how the site could be repositioned as a "special moment" within Liverpool's wider waterfront sequence. Rather than treating the Hartley Huts as isolated historic objects, the early proposal explored how their heritage value could inform a broader public realm strategy: one that improved visibility, encouraged people to pause, and made the site's overlooked histories more legible.



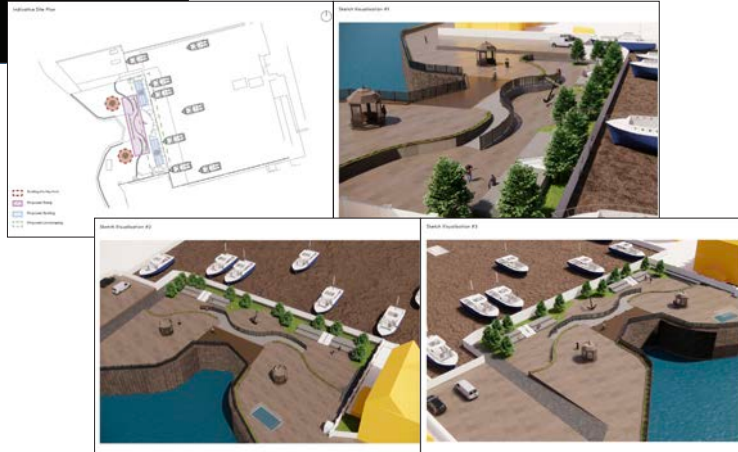
Hartley Huts - Heritage Intervention

The initial ideas included using the huts as curated points for artwork, interpretation and storytelling, while also addressing practical concerns around security, access and volunteer management. This aligned with the client's aspirations to protect the heritage character of the huts, support public engagement and create a more active but carefully stewarded waterfront condition.

ENGAGEMENT AS DESIGN METHOD

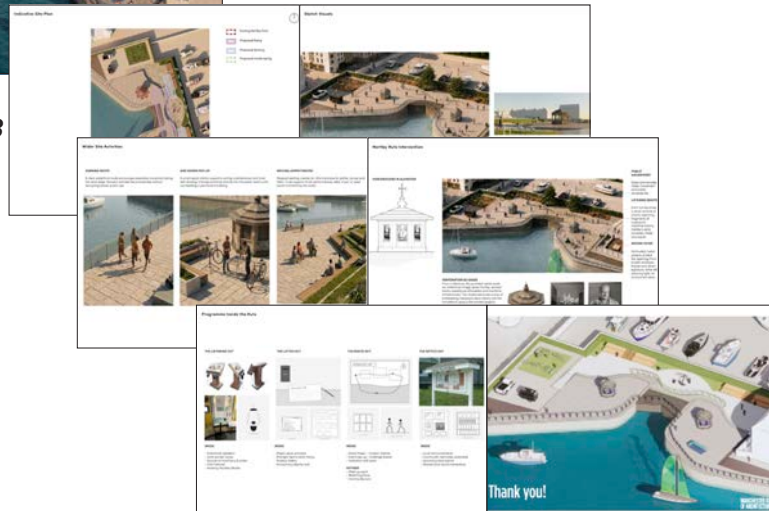
Client Meeting #2 marked a key point of design refinement, where initial spatial ideas were reviewed in relation to how the site would actually function. The discussion helped us test the placement of routes, gathering areas, planting and heritage interventions, allowing the proposal to become more grounded in the practical realities of public access, visibility and long-term use.

CLIENT MEETING #2



By Client Meeting #3, the proposal had moved from masterplan testing into a more resolved design strategy. Feedback focused on the detail of individual interventions, including the guided reveal of the Victorian toilets, perforated panels, signage benching, amphitheatre storage, accessible routes and public activity, helping the scheme become more coherent and deliverable.

CLIENT MEETING #3



PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT



1. ARRIVAL & GATHER
Visitors meet at the Hartley Huts for an introduction to the site's hidden history.



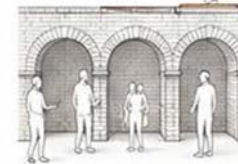
2. GUIDED ACCESS PREPARED
The guide explains the story and safety before opening the trap door.



3. TRAP DOOR OPENED
The lockable trap door is lifted to reveal the descent below ground.

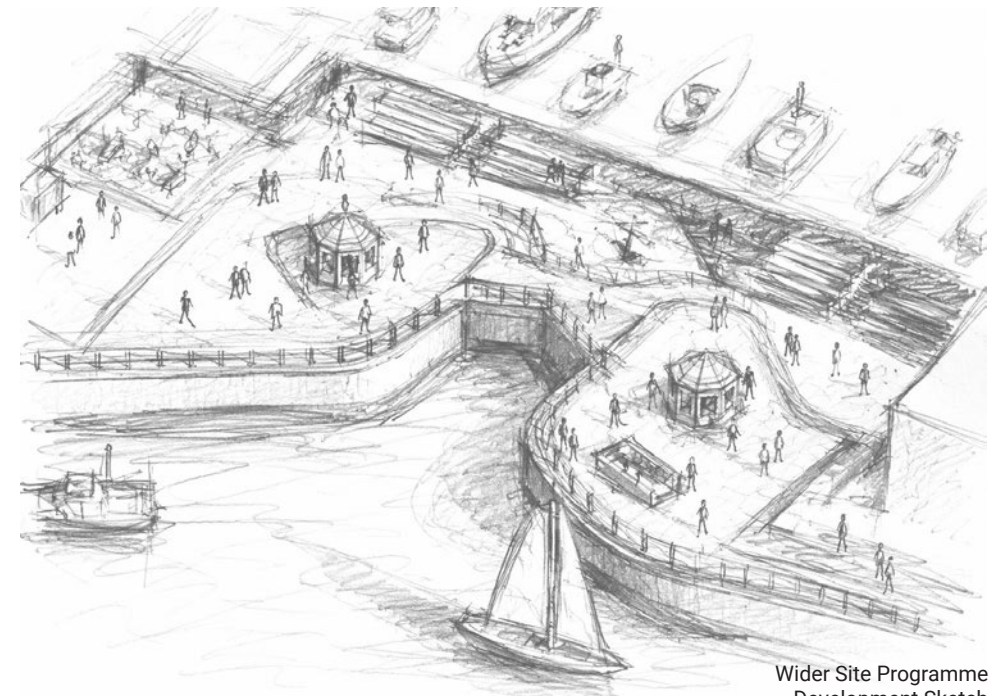


4. DESCENT WITH GUIDE
Visitors descend with the guide via secure steps into the Victorian toilet chamber.



5. HERITAGE INTERPRETATION
The guide shares the history and significance of the hidden Victorian toilets.

The programme developed as a layered sequence of everyday public use, guided heritage interpretation and flexible gathering. Rather than treating each intervention separately, the Hartley Huts, trap door access, amphitheatre, landscape and waterfront route were organised as one connected public experience that balances activation, access and heritage sensitivity.



Wider Site Programme Development Sketch

RESOLVING THE DESIGN'S EXPERIENCE (DESIGN DEVELOPMENT)

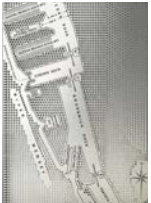
The proposal developed through a balance of individual initiative, collective design work and continuous feedback. While the client, heritage consultants and volunteers helped test the scheme against real needs, many ideas were generated by us through site analysis, design judgement and internal group discussions. The project was therefore not simply client-directed, but shaped through an exchange between our own proposals and the feedback received.

Initial ambitions around public realm improvement, heritage activation and creating a "special moment" were refined through discussions around access, maintenance, volunteer use, public engagement and long-term care. This feedback operated at both masterplan and detail level. The perforated panels evolved from a security idea into a system for protection, interpretation and storytelling; the signage benches became tools for wayfinding, seating and pause; and the amphitheatre was developed as both a gathering space and integrated storage opportunity.

Volunteer input grounded the proposal in day-to-day operation, particularly around events, guided tours, maintenance, storage and informal activity. The wider landscape strategy - including the accessible ramp, outdoor gym, water-tolerant planting, food truck provision and parking - was similarly developed through self-directed design testing and practical feedback.

As a result, the scheme evolved from a broad masterplan into a coordinated set of feedback-led, site-specific and deliverable interventions.

RESOLVED PERFORATED PANELS



BRUNSWICK DOCK
HISTORIC MAP



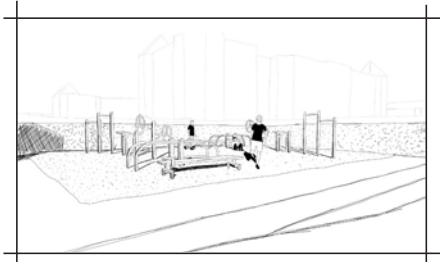
HISTORIC
CORVETTES



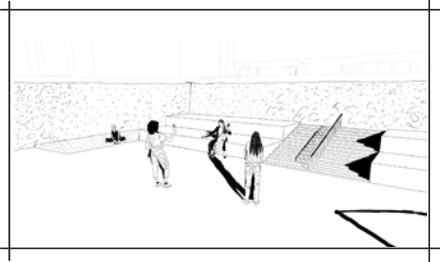
JESSE HARTLEY



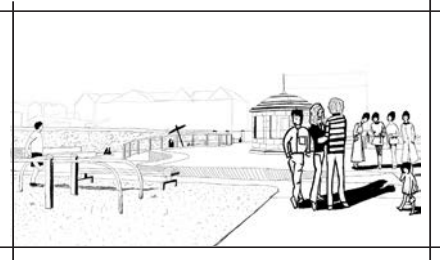
GUIDED HERITAGE TOUR
The trap door intervention introduces the hidden Victorian toilets as a supervised moment of discovery.



ACTIVE WATERFRONT EDGE
Outdoor exercise and movement activate the route without blocking circulation.



GATHERING AT THE AMPHITHEATRE
Stepped seating creates a flexible pause space for talks, rest and informal activity.



ARRIVAL AT THE HARTLEY HUTS
The huts act as a visible meeting point along the waterfront route.

View from the Waters

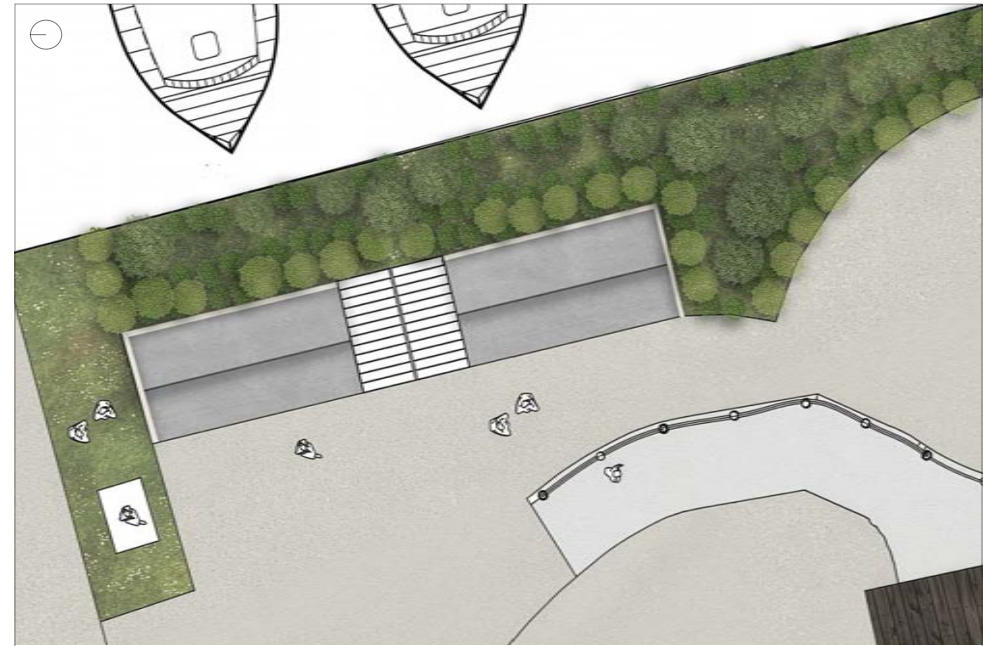




PROPOSED SITE PLAN



PROPOSED SITE SECTIONS



PROPOSED SOFTSCAPE STRATEGY

The planting uses a water-tolerant layered mix suited to a dockside setting. Taller evergreen shrubs create year-round structure and shelter, while lower shrubs add colour and soften the edge behind the amphitheatre, bringing seasonal interest through yellow flowers, purple groundcover tones, and varied evergreen textures.

Elaeagnus pungens
Silverberry



Main evergreen backing shrub



Mahonia aquifolium
Oregon grape



Seasonal accent shrub with yellow flowers



Euonymus fortunei
Wintercreeper



Low evergreen edge shrub



Ajuga reptans
Bugle



Damp-tolerant groundcover





FINAL DESIGN

The final proposal reframes the Hartley Huts and hidden Victorian toilets as part of a connected waterfront experience, rather than isolated heritage fragments. Through signage, benching, perforated panels, guided access, accessible routes, amphitheatre space, outdoor activity and water-tolerant planting, the scheme tests how a small heritage site can support everyday public use without losing its historic specificity.

Our early engagement with the client, heritage consultants and volunteers placed the project in a strong position ahead of Action Week. By entering the week with a clearer understanding of the site's operational, heritage and public-facing pressures, we were able to move beyond broad masterplan intentions and resolve the scheme through a more collaborative and critically informed process.

The design responds to this consultation by balancing activation with restraint. New interventions are treated as lightweight, legible and carefully positioned additions, allowing the historic fabric to remain the primary reference while making the site more accessible, social and meaningful. The result is a modest but strategic public pause within Liverpool's evolving waterfront, shaped by an engagement strategy that became central to the project's development.



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

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