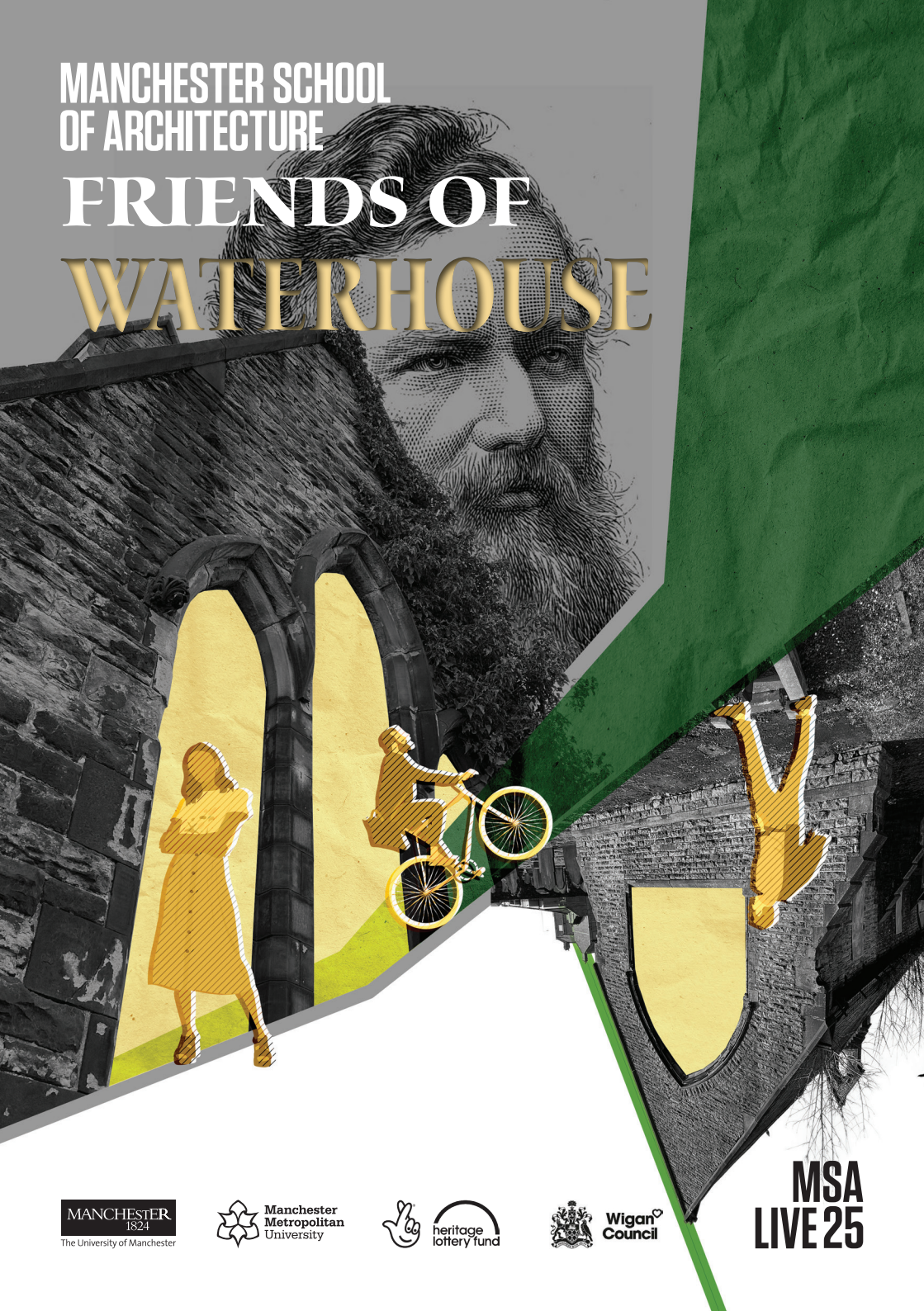


MANCHESTER SCHOOL
OF ARCHITECTURE

FRIENDS OF WATERHOUSE



MANCHESTER
1824
The University of Manchester

Manchester
Metropolitan
University

heritage
lottery fund

Wigan
Council

MSA
LIVE 25

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Partners

We are proud to be working in partnership with the Wigan Buildings Preservation Trust and the community of Ince to explore the future of the historic Waterhouse Chapels. This project has been supported by a £10,400 grant from the Architectural Heritage Fund to carry out a viability report, which will assess potential uses for the site and its long-term sustainability.

The Manchester School of Architecture is contributing to this process through its MSA Live programme, where students are actively involved in researching and articulating possible programme opportunities for the site. Their work brings fresh perspectives to the conversation, supporting a heritage-led approach to regeneration that is both creative and community-focused.

The involvement of local partners, including the Friends of Waterhouse Chapels, ensures the project remains rooted in local knowledge and values. Together, we are working to develop a vision for the site that not only preserves its architectural significance but also delivers meaningful benefits for the people of Ince.

Introduction

Friends of Waterhouse

This project focuses on the future of the Waterhouse Chapels—two Grade II listed, now disused, cemetery chapels located in Ince Cemetery. Designed by renowned Victorian architect Alfred Waterhouse, these buildings are vital to local heritage but have fallen into disrepair. Through research, design exploration, and community engagement, the project imagines new futures that honour their legacy while enabling contemporary use.

Over two weeks, students from the Manchester School of Architecture will explore how these historic structures can be reactivated through sustainable, creative, and socially responsive strategies. This includes investigating spatiotemporal placemaking—how time, memory, identity, and use shape a place's life.

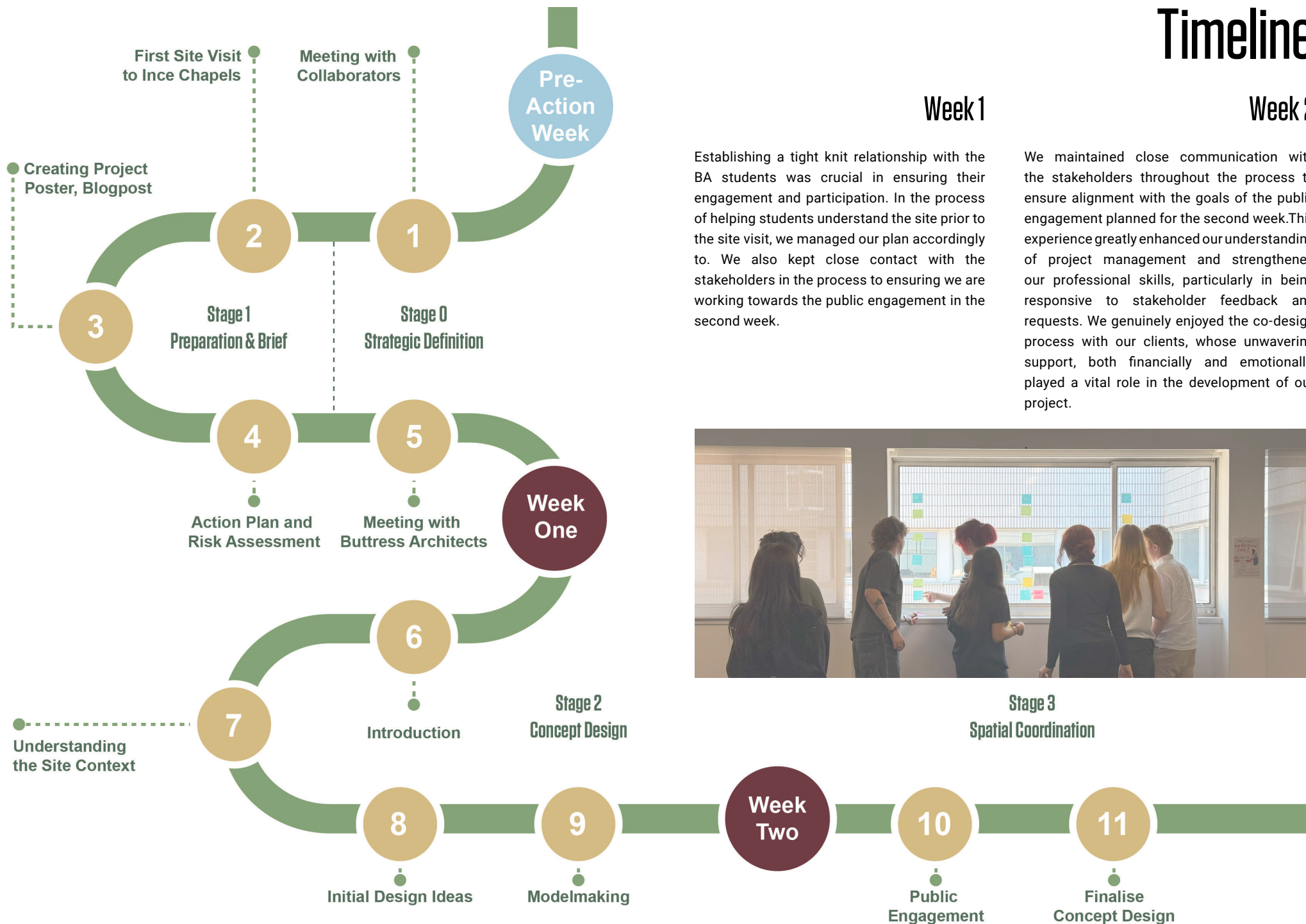
Week One focuses on-site research and contextual understanding. Students will study the history, demographics, and typologies of Ince and the chapels, creating professional presentations and physical models to inform early design thinking. Emphasis will be placed on visualising the site's spatial potential and surroundings.

In Week Two, students will visit the site and speak with residents to gather insights. These conversations will inform programme ideas tailored to community needs. Students will develop speculative proposals for reuse—ranging from cultural hubs to flexible, creative spaces—supported by drawings, models, and visual narratives.

Students will use tools like model-making, installations, mapping, and collaging throughout the project to test and express ideas. Workshops and critiques will support iterative thinking. The project concludes with a final presentation to the community, showcasing creative yet grounded proposals that reimagine the chapels as dynamic spaces once again serving Ince.

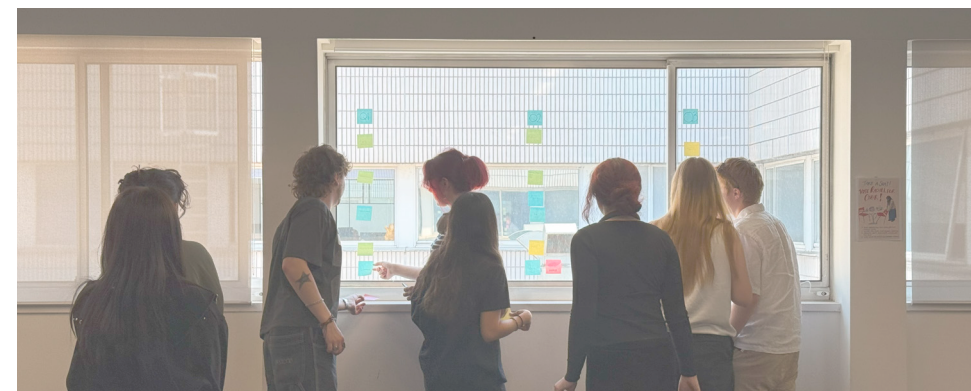


Timeline



Establishing a tight knit relationship with the BA students was crucial in ensuring their engagement and participation. In the process of helping students understand the site prior to the site visit, we managed our plan accordingly to. We also kept close contact with the stakeholders in the process to ensuring we are working towards the public engagement in the second week.

We maintained close communication with the stakeholders throughout the process to ensure alignment with the goals of the public engagement planned for the second week. This experience greatly enhanced our understanding of project management and strengthened our professional skills, particularly in being responsive to stakeholder feedback and requests. We genuinely enjoyed the co-design process with our clients, whose unwavering support, both financially and emotionally, played a vital role in the development of our project.

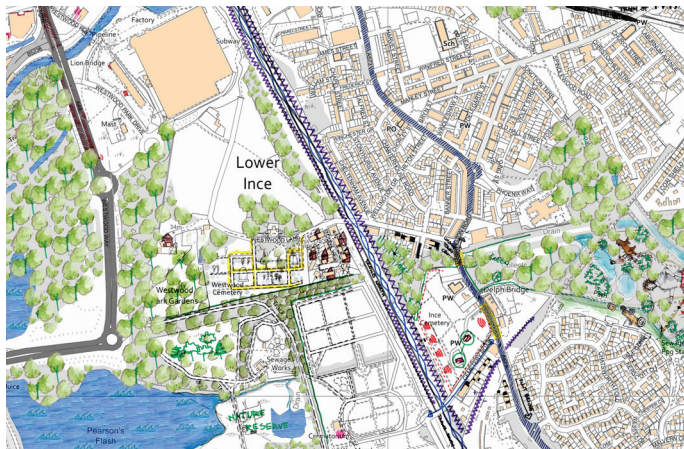


Stage 3
Spatial Coordination

Heritage and Demographics

This demographic study focuses on Ince, a district within the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan in Greater Manchester, England. Historically rooted in industry and working-class culture, Ince presents a complex socio-economic landscape shaped by shifts in employment, housing, and health over recent decades. As part of our architectural investigation into the Ince Chapels site, understanding the statistical data and local trends, allow us to uncover how social dynamics influence and are influenced by the built environment.

As a team, we created a demographic diagram to synthesise and visualise key social and economic factors shaping Ince, using data from Digimap's socio-economic layers. We focused on eight categories: households, housing, population, labour market, origins and ethnicity, education, health, and area characteristics. Each student analysed one category, helping build a detailed understanding of the area. Our analysis revealed a community facing multiple socio-economic challenges. Ince has many single-person and lone-parent households, often linked to low incomes and social isolation. Housing is mostly older terraced and social stock, with underinvestment and low ownership. Population decline is driven by youth migration and ageing. Employment is limited to low-skilled, manual jobs with high unemployment. The community is predominantly White British, with little ethnic diversity. Educational attainment is below average, and many lack qualifications. Health outcomes are poor, with high rates of chronic illness and mental health issues. Ince ranks among the most deprived areas in Wigan, with limited access to services and infrastructure, highlighting the need for sensitive, inclusive design interventions.



COLOUR

FIGURE

EMOTION

The Process

Following our meeting with Buttress Architects and the clients, there was a strong emphasis on exploring the relationship between colour and emotion in communicating architectural ideas. This led to a thought-provoking discussion among the team, which naturally extended into how we wanted the students to begin approaching their own design thinking.

We encouraged the students to each select a colour, an emotion, and a figure—someone they felt inspired by or connected to. These selections were then swapped among the group, and each student was tasked with creating a sketch that visualised the emotion they interpreted from this new combination. This exercise served as an entry point for the students to begin considering how atmosphere, feeling, and personal narrative can influence the spatial experience.

Modelmaking was essential for engaging stakeholders and the public, helping to physically express the existing textures and character of the site. As a team, we created a range of models—including a site model, physical studies, and 3D prints—at various scales to clearly communicate the current conditions.





Public Engagement

“Meeting the public showed us that good architecture begins with listening and builds through shared understanding.”

A site visit was conducted on the 20th of May. Our team travelled to the Clinic & Community Centre in Ince, where we met with our collaborators to present the recent progress of our work and to receive their valuable support. We prepared a site analysis sheet, a proposal outlining the potential future functions of the church, as well as both a site model and a church model. These materials formed the basis for a series of productive discussions with our partners. Following the meeting, we visited the site together and engaged in in-depth conversations on location. This allowed us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the site's conditions, informing and guiding the subsequent stages of our design process.



Site Visit

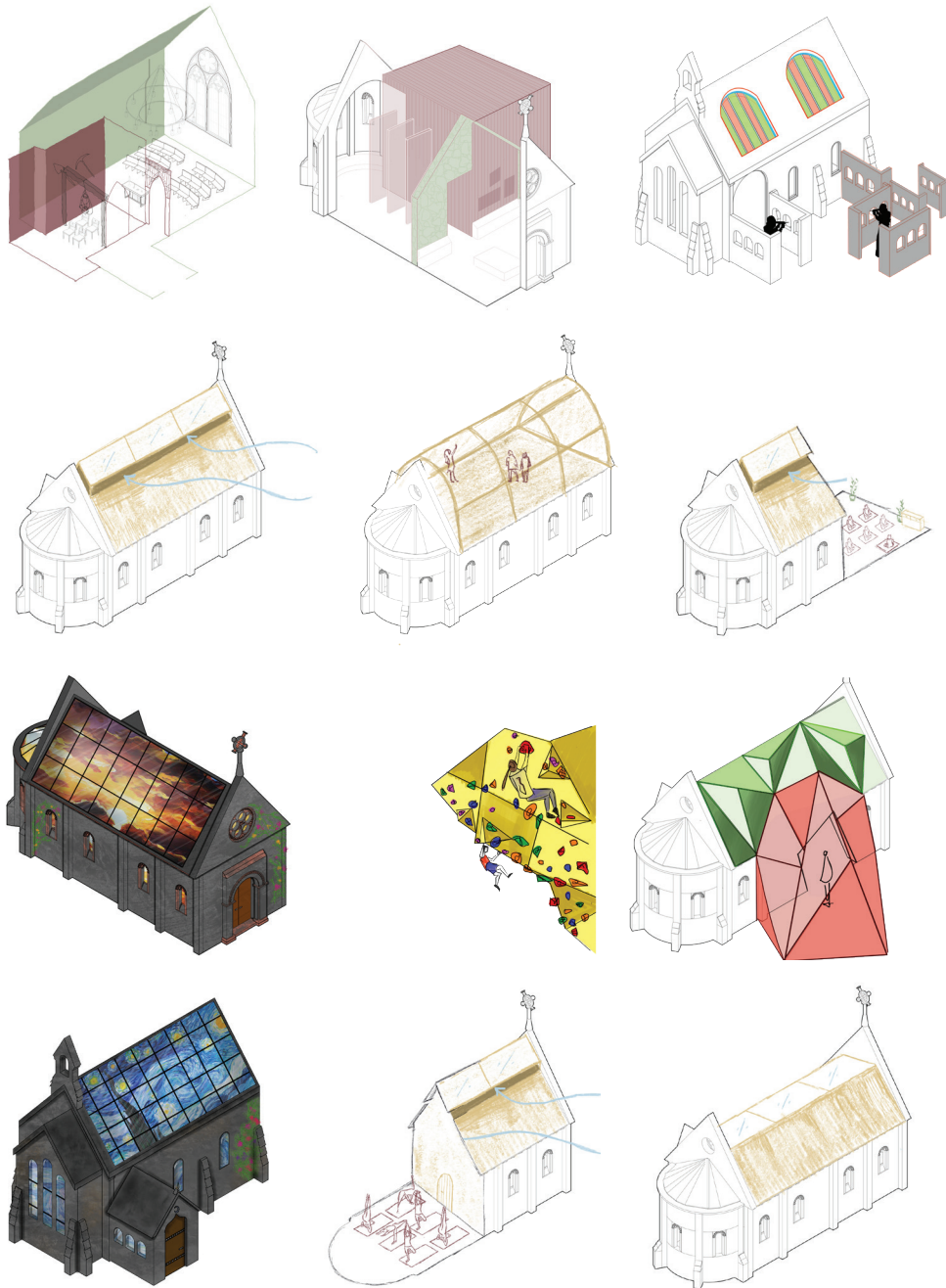
This task enabled the students to develop a deeper understanding of the site, providing valuable guidance for the subsequent design stages. It also broadened their design thinking by encouraging them to consider more context-responsive and community-informed approaches in their proposals.



overgrown mining town shrinkage neglect cemetery-land ageing
level of destruction sense of scale
popularity among locals mismatched serene hidden
peaceful public awareness non accessible green corridor

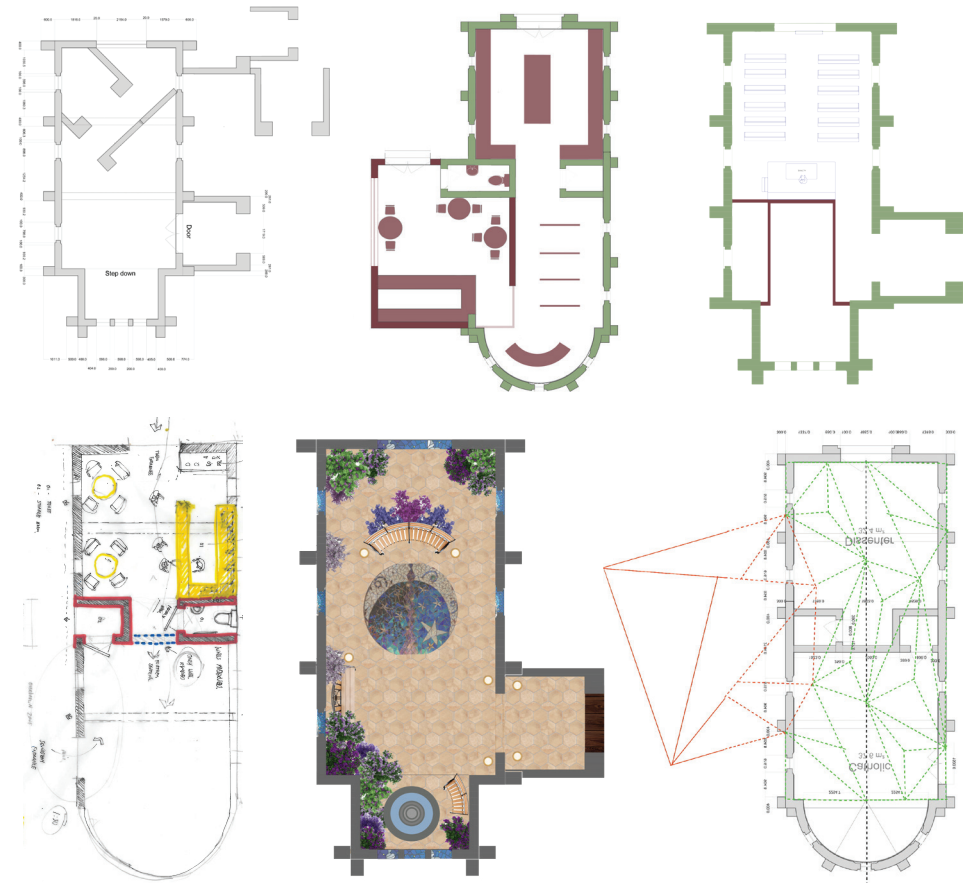


Program Establishment



Following the site visit, students critically engaged with the feedback gathered during the community engagement event, which was pivotal in shaping their design direction. Through careful analysis of local needs and aspirations, three key thematic categories emerged as central to the redevelopment of the Ince Chapels: Heritage, Arts and Culture, and Health and Wellbeing. These categories reflected the community's desire to both preserve the chapels' historical significance and reimagine them as inclusive, multifunctional spaces that respond to present-day challenges.

Each theme informed the development of specific programmatic strategies and spatial interventions, allowing students to propose meaningful uses that resonate with Ince's socio-cultural context. The Heritage strand focused on celebrating the architectural and historical character of the chapels, proposing interpretive installations and flexible exhibition areas. Arts and Culture encouraged the incorporation of workshop spaces, performance zones, and creative studios, supporting local artistic expression and intergenerational engagement. Health and Wellbeing addressed the urgent need for accessible community support, integrating spaces for counselling, group activities, and quiet reflection.



A Place for Dwelling

The final proposal for the chapels integrates three core characteristics: arts & culture, health & wellbeing, and heritage. Our vision is to fuse the existing historic fabric of the chapels with a contemporary 'plug-in' intervention, creating a dynamic space of dwelling that fosters placemaking for both the public and its users. This adaptive design ensures the space evolves with the community's needs over time, maintaining the building's relevance and viability in response to contemporary demands.



Our Final Day



Reflection

As part of MSA Live, our group explored ways to reactivate the Ince Chapels in Wigan—two disused yet historically significant churches designed by Alfred Waterhouse. Over two weeks, we investigated how these buildings could serve the community once again. Through site visits and guidance from Buttress Architects and the Wigan Building Preservation Trust, students gained valuable insight into the chapels' heritage and challenges. Hands-on work—including physical models, 3D printing, and site analysis—shaped thoughtful, collaborative design proposals. The process was creative, inclusive, and highly engaging. Final outcomes balanced heritage conservation with contemporary use, communicated through sketches, models, diagrams, and AI tools.

Looking back, the past few weeks were an incredibly enjoyable and rewarding experience. Collaborating with students, staff, clients, and the public brought real energy and depth to the project. The opportunity to work on a live heritage site was invaluable—particularly for those interested in pursuing careers in conservation, adaptive reuse, and community-focused design. The experience offered meaningful insight into the realities of working on real-world projects, blending creativity with purpose.



ABOUT

Each year the MSA LIVE programme unites Masters Architecture year 1 and Masters of Architecture & Adaptive Resuse students with those in BA year 1 and year 2 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 masters students take the lead in the project conception, brief development, delivery and co-ordination of a small project. Other cohorts joined for an eventful 2 weeks of activities 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 650 students from 5 cohorts in MSA have worked on 40 projects with partners.

QUESTIONS

For questions about MSA LIVE please contact the MSA LIVE team:

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BLOG

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