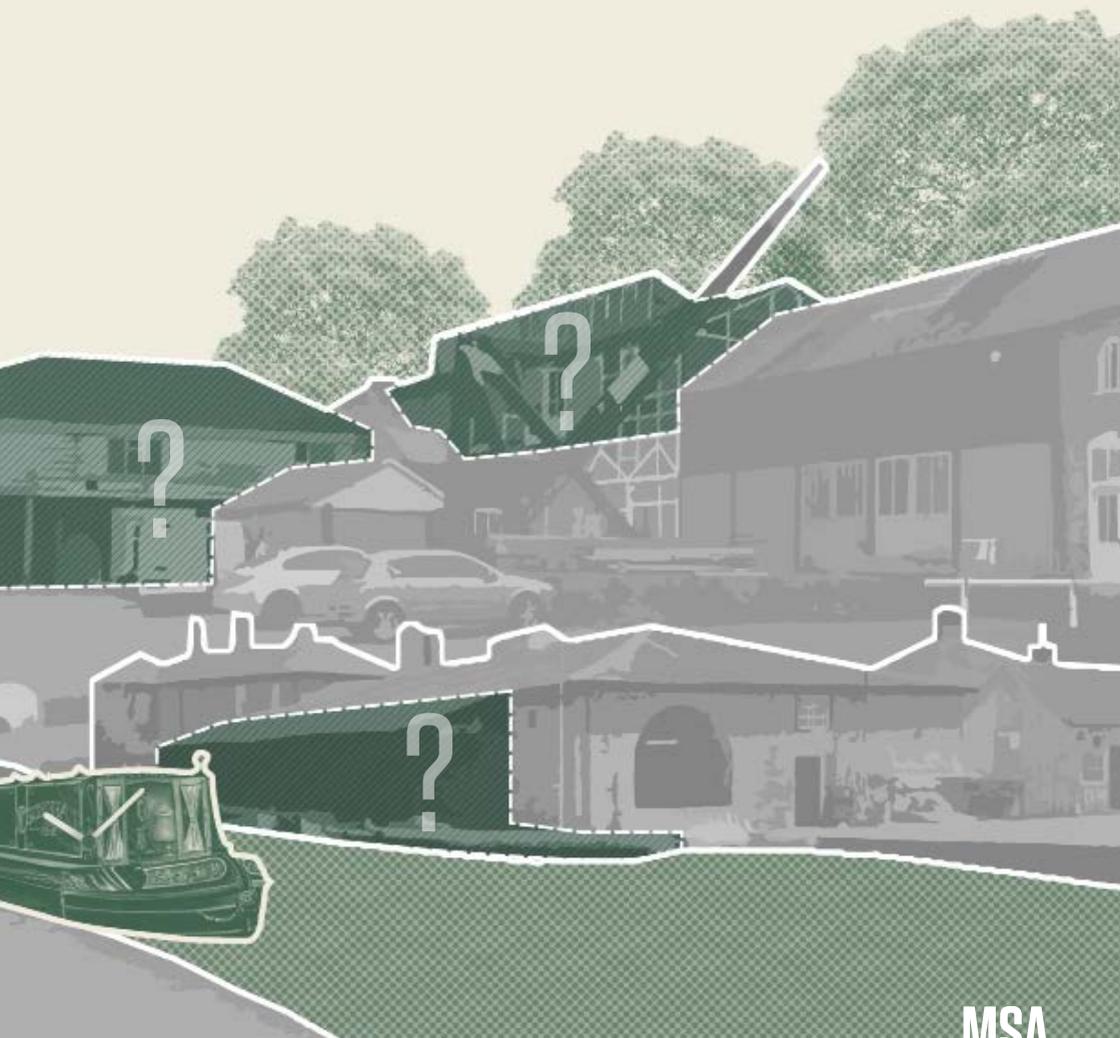


MANCHESTER SCHOOL
OF ARCHITECTURE

ENRICHING ELLESMERE



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PROJECT WEBSITE

<https://ellesmerecanalyard.wixsite.com/msaliveellesmere>

Partners

Ellesmere Canal Yard, in Shropshire, is located alongside the Llangollen Canal and presents a well preserved example of a canal maintenance yard. Built in the early 1800's the site served as the original workshop of engineer Thomas Telford's Shropshire Canal Company. Today the site is owned by the Canal & River Trust and retains its former use, producing specialist heritage metalwork for the upkeep of 2,000 miles of canals, rivers and their associated infrastructure. The site is inclusive of many Grade II* listed buildings and is abundant with artefacts that further speak of the rich history at Ellesmere.

Sue Ball is a cultural producer who works in the context of social and spatial design and is Director of the creative regeneration practice Media and Arts Partnership (MAAP). She operates in the gaps between sectors and disciplines to generate new professional learning and interdisciplinary design processes for urban space and works to mobilise and strengthen value systems related to place and community.

Commissioned by the Canal & River Trust since 2010, Sue has developed a 'slow architecture' methodology to re-occupy historic waterside sites across the UK. As of January 2020, Sue has been engaged with Ellesmere Canal Yard. Applying this approach of 'slow architecture', Sue is working with the Canal & River Trust to co produce its re-animation as a site for making, design and fabrication.

Agenda

Enriching Ellesmere

Although remaining operational, much of Ellesmere Canal Yard still stands empty, underutilised and free of activity. In assessing opportunities for new uses and intervention, Sue Ball of MAAP, together with the Canal & River Trust, has engaged students from the Manchester School of Architecture to contribute towards this vision of revitalisation at Ellesmere Canal Yard.

Currently ongoing, the renovation of Ellesmere Canal Yard has only progressed as far as RIBA Stage 1. Consequently, without any firm design proposal, the scheme is open to all ideas and the early input of creative and lateral thinking brought by undergraduate architecture students is highly valued in deciding the future trajectory of the site.

For this two week project, as part of MSA Live 2022, students worked together in small groups to propose ideas for what the site could be. To help focus the students, three distinct study areas were selected across the site, each with their own unique characteristics, opportunities and problems.

Over the course of a series of guided workshops and discussions, students developed their proposals towards these areas, with the aim of broadening social productivity and community involvement within the wider site. In working with these historic spaces students were encouraged to think about ideas surrounding adaptive re-use, heritage, intervention, preservation and materiality, contextualised by a nationally important site.

The second half of the project saw the students produce a series of drawings, sketches and diagrams to communicate their proposals and the interventions and activity they bring to the site. Software tutorials, discussion and precedent studies provided aid in the development of visual style and mixed media techniques.

The project then culminated in a student led presentation to Sue Ball and friends of Ellesmere Canal Yard, demonstrating the collective work achieved across the two weeks and a vision for the future of Ellesmere Canal Yard.

The Site

Following discussion with Sue and a visit to the site prior to the start of MSA Live, a series of key study areas were identified and agreed for the undergraduate students to work on. They each present different opportunities, connections and relationships that can support a range of proposals.

The first area consists of a small timber lean-to structure alongside the bank of the canal. Built up against the more substantial drydock building, the lean-to presents the challenge of dealing with a space with little enclosure, offering simply a pitched roof, a series of columns and the stone walls it leans upon for support. The question of privacy, enclosure and outdoor connection will define the extent of intervention within this space. This study area is also unique amongst the other selections across the site due to the proximity of the canal, offering another distinct relationship to consider.

Next is the timber store building which sits centrally to the yard when viewed from across the canal. Speaking with Sue, this building more than most felt particularly underused. The entirety of the first floor is unoccupied despite presenting a spacious roof void complete with exposed timber trusses that lend a great sense of character to the space. Below, an open fronted ground floor propped with columns and used only for miscellaneous storage feels similarly lacking in potential especially given the direct relation to the yard.

The final area for proposals is the joinery workshop which occupies a first floor space towards the rear of the site. By way of long north light glazing, the room has a very ambient quality that is exaggerated by the stark white painted surfaces throughout. Also noted is the possible link between this space and the sloping field that sits behind. Rising up from the canal bank, the peak of the hill is near aligned with the first floor level of the joinery workshop. With plans already under way for the field, this connection could be carefully considered as a means of establishing new connections within the wider canal yard site.

Image First Row:
Three study areas
highlighted on site

Image Second Row Left:
Canal side lean-to exterior

Image Second Row Right:
Canal side lean-to interior

Image Third Row Left:
Timber store exterior

Image Third Row Right:
Timber store interior

Image Fourth Row Left:
Joinery workshop exterior

Image Fourth Row Right:
Joinery workshop interior



The Process

Sue Ball opened the project by introducing Ellesmere Canal Yard to the students. First-hand knowledge presented by Sue allowed for greater understanding of the site in the absence of a traditional visit. While a site visit for the students at the start of the project would have been preferred, it was logistically difficult given the distance to Shropshire. This task was then made harder by the current lack of transport infrastructure at Ellesmere Canal Yard: one aspect of the plan for the field already is provision of a car park.

To ease the students into the project, work began as a whole team upon the canal side lean-to space which was deemed a great way of demonstrating the process and development of ideas surrounding historic spaces but without the complexity of the timber store and joinery workshop that were to follow. Encouraged to sketch first based on instinct, initial ideas were then compared to establish common themes in terms of usage, intervention and materials. Ideas could then be streamlined, supported by appropriate precedent studies and pushed further by discussion. As part of this, students were asked to consider the role of heritage in order to critically appraise their proposals.

Moving onto the timber store and joinery workshop spaces, the students were split into two groups based on their interests and attraction towards each space. After analysing the qualities of each space through survey drawings and site photographs, the students could then begin to apply the same methodology from the canal side lean-to space to work up their designs.

Having established proposals for all three spaces, attention turned towards the production of final drawings, intended to explain design thinking, convey a sense of activity and new use, as well as providing Ellesmere Canal Yard with an image package to assist in future fund-raising campaigns and applications. Precedent studies, combined with software tutorials, encouraged mixed media thinking which expanded upon earlier hand sketches to build an appropriate visual style for the level of detail and resolution of the proposals.

At times the process has been difficult and thrown off schedule, largely being attributed to poor attendance from select individuals which slowed the design process and placed more pressure on the remaining students. However, by the end of the project the students came together to produce a series of creative designs that imagine a revitalised Ellesmere.

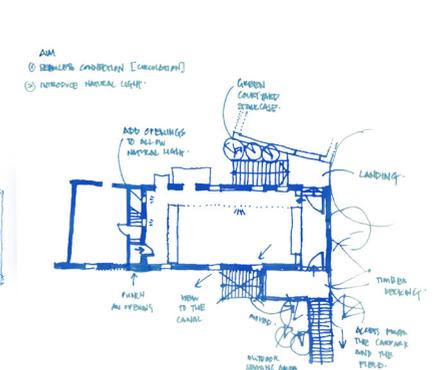
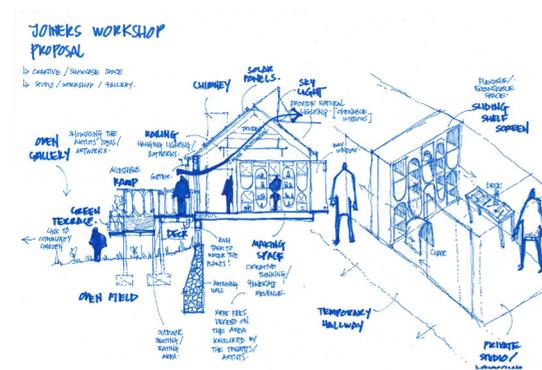
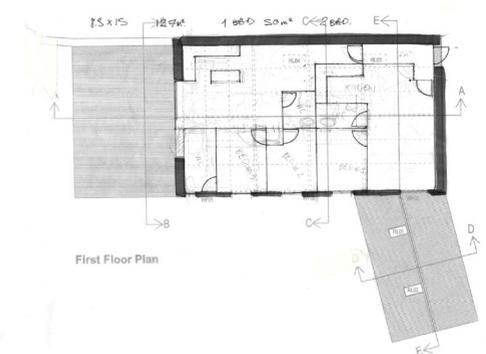
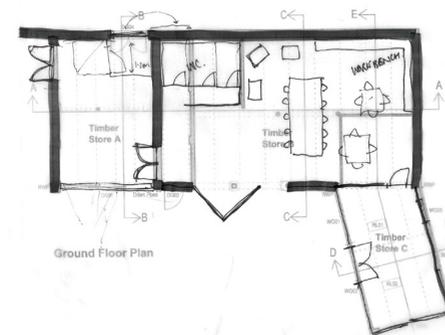
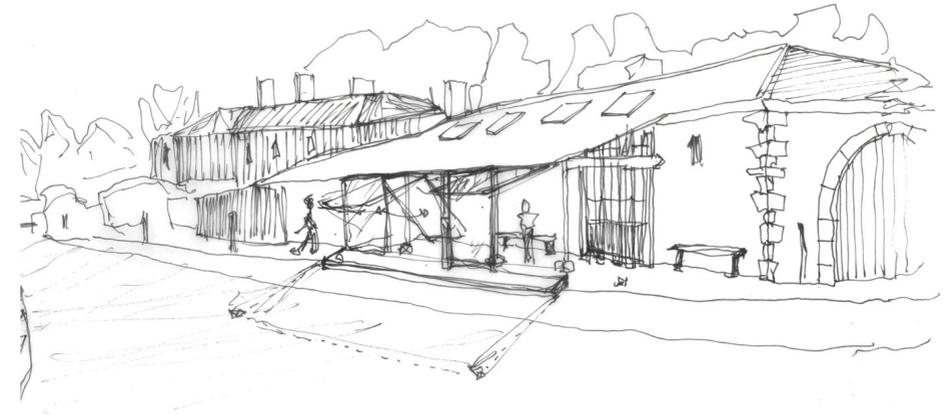
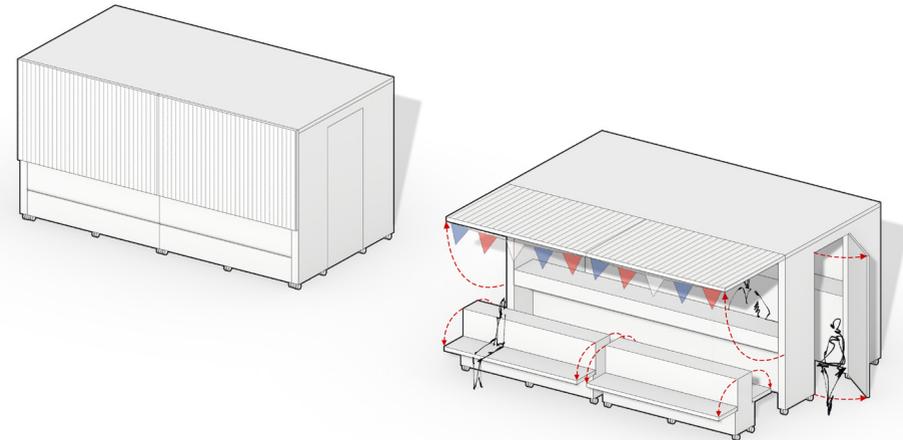


Image Top:
Canal side lean-to
perspective sketch

Image Middle:
Timber store draft plans

Image Bottom:
Joinery workshop design
development sketches

Canal Side Lean-to



The driving focus for this space is based upon creating an intervention that can become a source of income which, at first, funds itself before funding other areas across the site.

Thinking about the space and its proximity to the canal, a primary target user was quickly established as those passing in a canal barge. What service might they benefit from? Initial ideas proposed a workshop, a seating space and even a sauna! The most practical was deemed to be a drinks stall due to its seasonal flexibility and easy operation.

Given the lack of enclosure provided by the lean-to space, it was suggested that any intervention could be its own self-contained unit that simply slots inside. This concept, in the context of selling drinks, finds a distinct parallel in independent mobile vendor carts.

This gives several benefits including total preservation. As a separate and removable unit, no alteration to historic material is required. In moving the unit, the drinks stall can also be repositioned elsewhere, such as the yard or field, when needed for events and open days. Wheels to the base of the stall facilitate this easy movement. In keeping a simple design and construction, the drinks stall remains low cost, presenting a means for early income generation with only a small initial investment that could itself be the result of community fundraising.

Image Top:
Proposed mobile drink stall closed and in use with opening service hatch and pull out seating

Image Bottom:
Perspective view of mobile drink stalls in situ



Timber Store

Given the scale of the timber store a mixed-use strategy for re-use was proposed. In essence this amounted to a more productive function on the ground floor given the direct connection to the yard, relative to a private function above afforded by the change in floor level.

Seeking new sources of revenue, the ground floor proposal features a public workshop, perhaps with access paid for by the hour, that remains in keeping with the enduring history of craft and assembly across the canal yard. The main existing storage space which would constitute this workshop is already open plan and accepting of new furnishings so little intervention is required. Simply some light partitions are to be removed to expand the space to its fullest, whilst a new block of toilets is to be added. Currently open fronted, the scheme also proposes the addition of a large, floor to ceiling folding glazed door which, in the summer months, affords production within the workshop to spill out into the main yard.

An existing storeroom also finds new life as a community market, offering hyper local produce grown in the sites very own field garden.

Independently to this is the formation of two new holiday flats to the first floor above. The intention being that these flats are short let and provide a constant turnover of income. The larger of the flats includes two bedrooms and caters to a family or a group of friends, whilst the second flat offers space only for a couple or single guest. Contrasting room types have been deemed most appropriate so not to alienate a potential user group. In setting out these two flats, care has been taken to consider the placement of partitions relative to existing windows and roof trusses.

The practicality of such a conversion was also interrogated through inclusion of appropriate corridor widths as well as floor areas and dimensions in line with space standards. Key fire safety principles such as door swings and kitchen placement were also applied.

Currently the first floor is only accessible via a ladder from the store below. For this proposal, to keep the private flat access separate from the public workshop, a new stair was suggested. This would occupy the empty space that is currently the boiler room. A metal stair, built onsite by the blacksmith, rises up to a landing providing access to the first-floor flats, before turning into a walkway, rising up a small flight of steps again to connect with the final area of study, the joinery workshop.

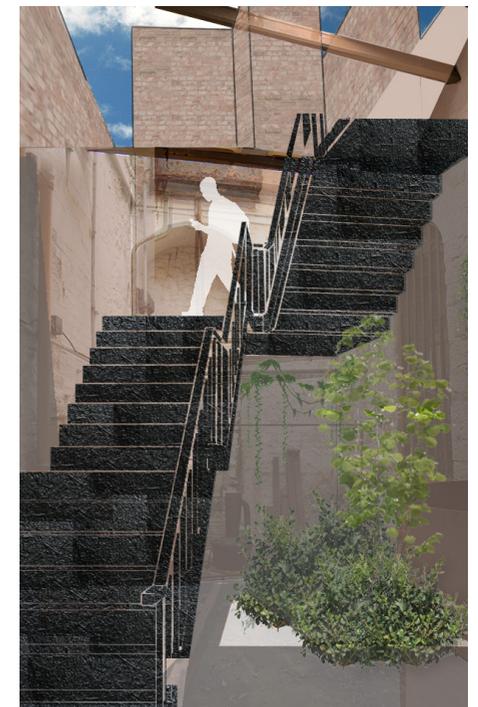
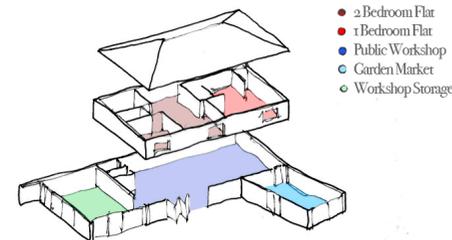
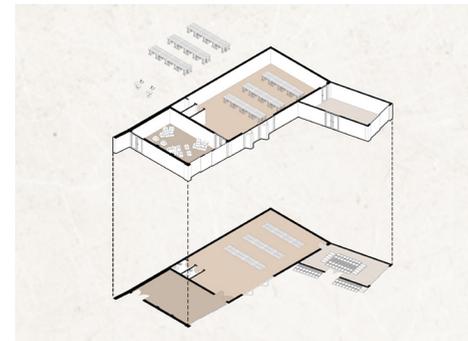


Image Top:
Perspective view of
proposed timber store
redevelopment with
workshop and market

Image Middle Left:
Exploded ground floor
axonometric

Image Bottom Left:
Exploded programme
diagram

Image Bottom Right:
Perspective view of
proposed connecting stair

Joinery Workshop

The joinery workshop was immediately noted for its impressive roof space, complete with timber trusses and ambient north light running the entire length. An effort to maintain both of these defined the design approach.

Firstly, the light quality was immediately associated with a working or production space which produced the leading idea of an artist studio. The intention for the operation of this space revolves around an 'artist in residence' where the space may be rented, providing an income for the canal yard, for a period of months at a time. The artist then benefits from an airy studio space and, through open days and events, can interface with the public visiting the site to sell or display their work.

This leads to the secondary zone within the space – a public facing 'reception area'. This space is intended to operate as a point of mediation, bridging the gap between the residential first floor and proposed linking staircase to the west, and the field and point of public arrival to the east. In both cases a window has been knocked through to floor level to form a new door which facilitates this circulation.

In considering the existing fabric of the space, it was agreed after discussion that the best approach was a 'light touch' intervention that minimised direct connection and assembly against historic material. This was realised in the form of movable, hard-working furniture which could be rearranged into a series of configurations to best suit the different working practices and disciplines of the potential artists who may rent the space. For instance, strategically placed shelf units may be used to create bays for multiple artists. Moving these may open up a bigger floor space for a sculptor.

A long shelf also serves to divide the artist studio from the public zone. A glazed back panel maintains glimpses into the studio between the shelves while still providing a degree of privacy for work inside.



Image Top:
Perspective view of artist studio

Image Middle Left:
Axonometric diagram showing studio configured for single artist occupation

Image Middle Right:
Axonometric diagram showing studio configured for exhibition

Image Bottom Left:
Axonometric diagram showing studio configured for single artist occupation with further glazed projection to external

Image Bottom Right:
Axonometric diagram showing studio configured for exhibition with further glazed projection to external

'The Fields'



Image Top:
Perspective view of approach from car park

Image Bottom Left:
Perspective view along trench walkway

Image Bottom Right:
View from landscape above trench

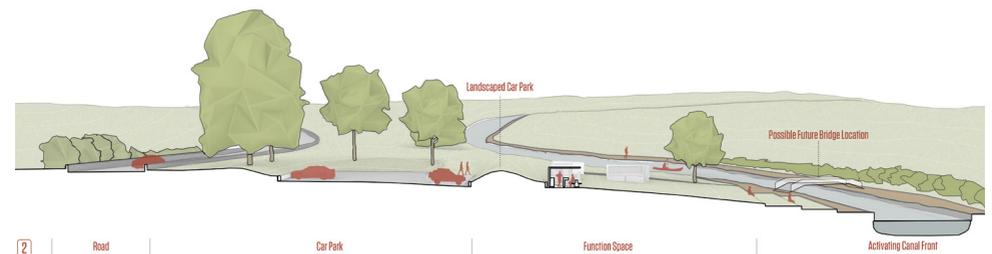
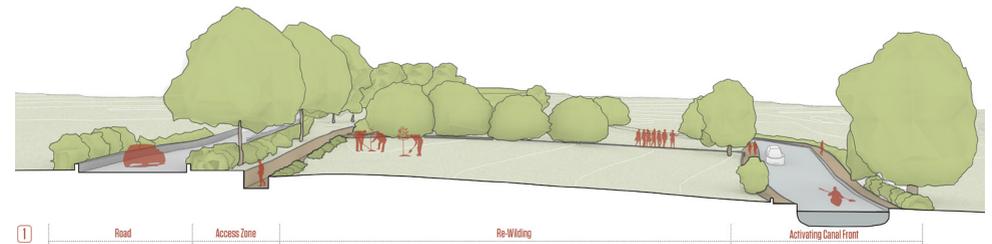
Image Top (over page):
Overview of landscape proposal

Image Middle (over page):
Section through trench and re-wilding landscape

Image Bottom (over page):
Section through car park and canal side function space

The field to the far side of the site is already subject to plans and developments, including community planting and a proposed car park to improve site access. Consequently, proposals for this area worked around this and attempted to imagine a walkable connection between the car park and the new entrance to the joinery workshop space.

A language of trenches and sunken zones was developed with the intention of minimising impact upon the landscape. Particularly for the car park, as series of mounds blend with the natural topography to conceal the cars when viewed from the opposite canal tow path.



ABOUT

Each year the MSA LIVE programme unites M Arch. year 01 with B Arch. year 01 and 02 and M Land. Arch 01 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 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 550 students from 4 cohorts in MSA have worked on 35 projects with partners.

QUESTIONS

For questions about MSA LIVE please contact the MSA LIVE team:
msalive@mmu.ac.uk

BLOG

live.msa.ac.uk/2022

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