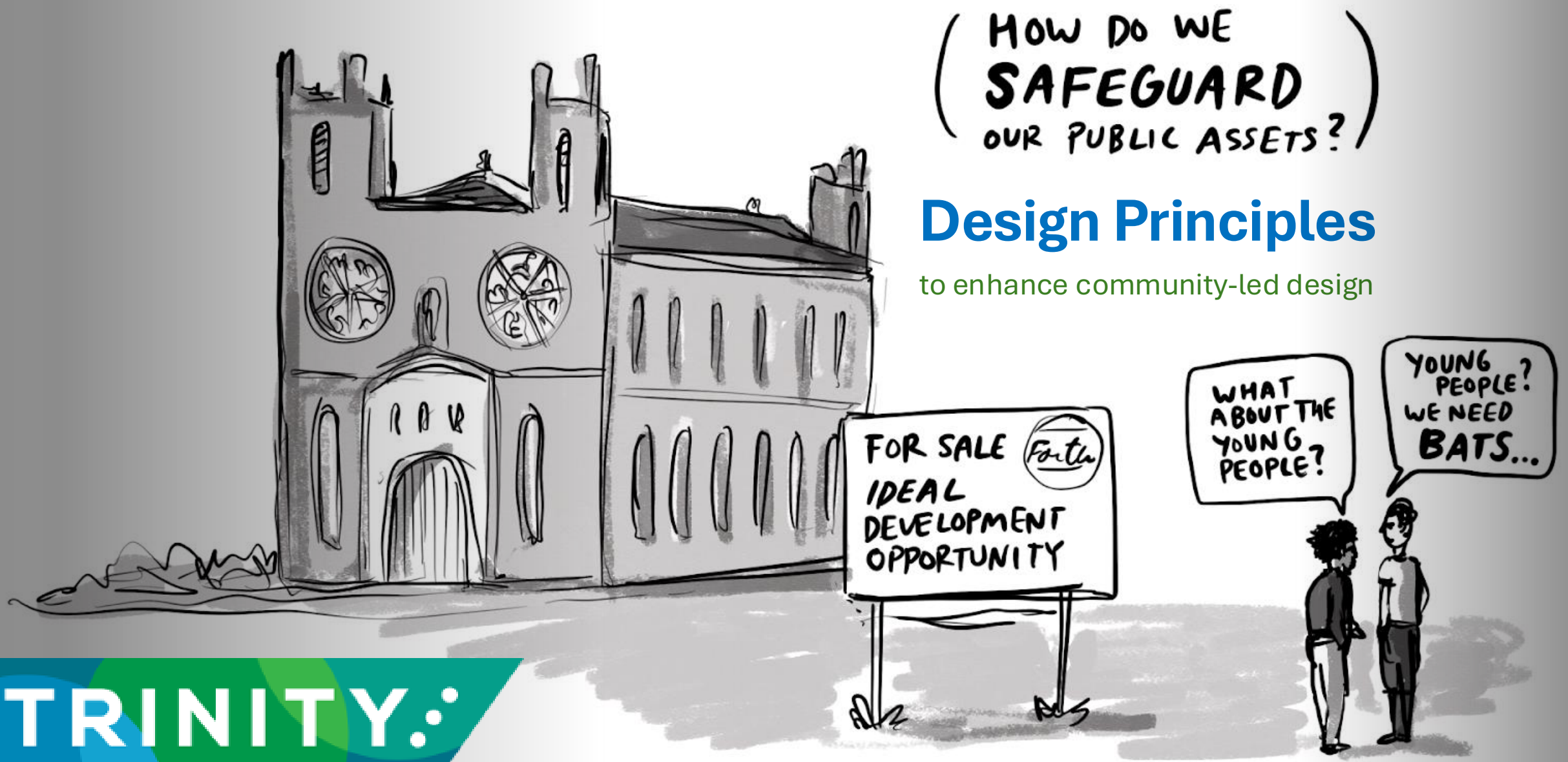


Design Principles

to enhance community-led design

TRINITY.:

VISUAL THINKERY

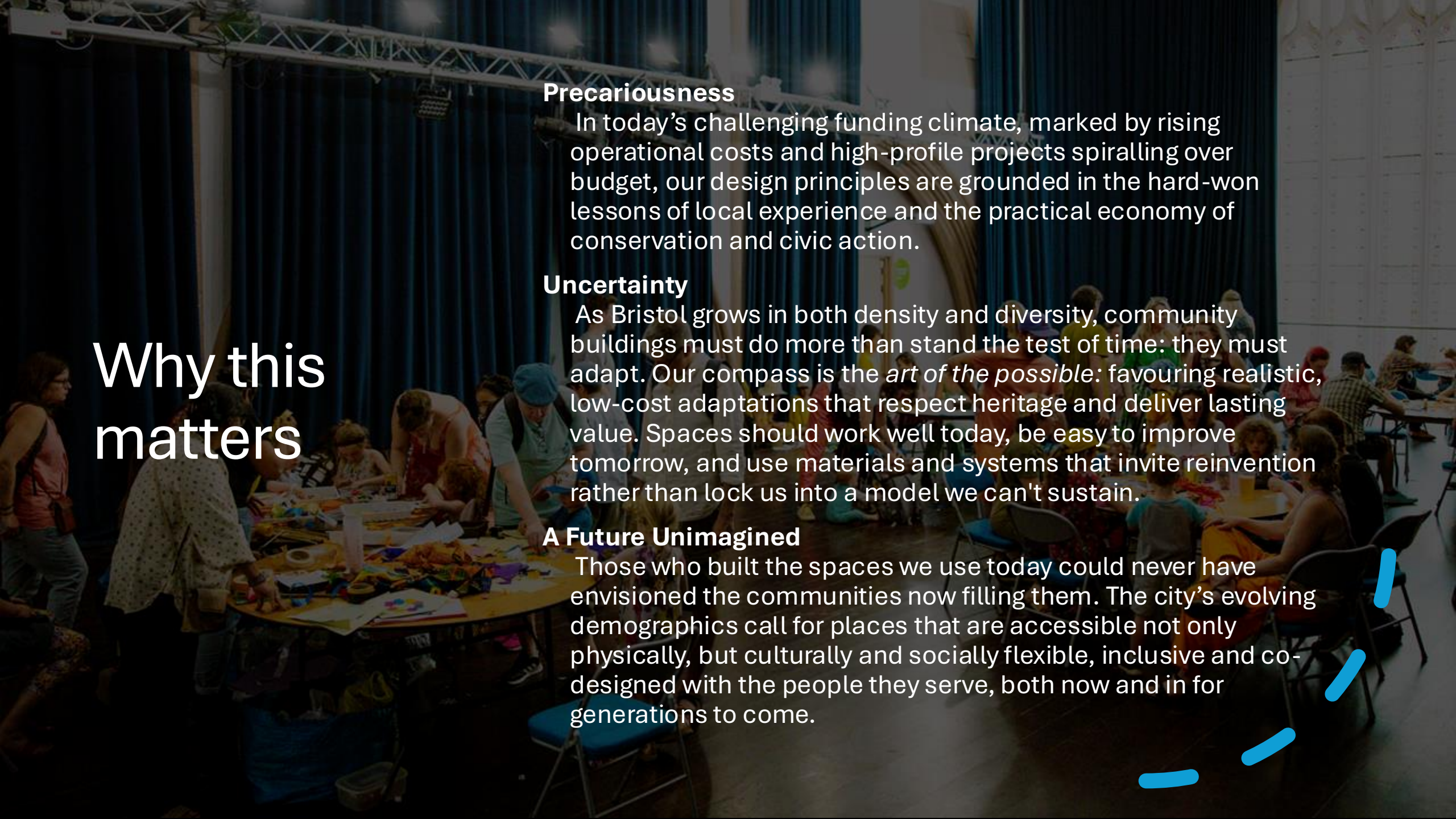
Intro

Trinity's Design Principles set out how we approach the adaptation and reuse of our historic buildings.

They reflect the potential and reality of community-led design; working within tight budgets, where aspirations meet compromise and where the dreams of tomorrow emerge from the foundations of yesterday and what we can make possible today.

Our aim is to create spaces that are practical, affordable and adaptable, meeting the needs of communities of the now while leaving room for the reflections of people past and for future generations to reimagine them.

Rooted in sustainability, inclusivity and heritage, our principles help us make choices that are achievable, while keeping a building's journey alive and able to be continued to be redefined by whatever may come next.



Why this matters

Precariousness

In today's challenging funding climate, marked by rising operational costs and high-profile projects spiralling over budget, our design principles are grounded in the hard-won lessons of local experience and the practical economy of conservation and civic action.

Uncertainty

As Bristol grows in both density and diversity, community buildings must do more than stand the test of time: they must adapt. Our compass is the *art of the possible:* favouring realistic, low-cost adaptations that respect heritage and deliver lasting value. Spaces should work well today, be easy to improve tomorrow, and use materials and systems that invite reinvention rather than lock us into a model we can't sustain.

A Future Unimagined

Those who built the spaces we use today could never have envisioned the communities now filling them. The city's evolving demographics call for places that are accessible not only physically, but culturally and socially flexible, inclusive and co-designed with the people they serve, both now and in for generations to come.

Practicality

Affordability

Prioritise changes that can be delivered within available skills, budget and time. Avoid design choices that require specialist upkeep or costly custom fabrication unless critical to accessibility or safety.

Flexibility

Favour simple functional layouts, fittings and infrastructure that can be adapted to serve multiple purposes, so spaces can change function to meet different needs and interests.

Inclusivity

Involve

Design with everyone. Take care to make the extra step to reach those who might otherwise be overlooked. Test options with people throughout the design process, not as an afterthought and reach decisions as a collective, deliberative effort.

Iterate

Recognise that this is one phase in the building's long life. The work we do now should not try to "finish" it, but to strengthen it for the next chapter.

Design with flexibility so future generations can adapt it for needs we cannot yet imagine. Consider the communities of tomorrow in any re-imagining just as much as those of today.

Possibility

Deliverability

Balance the "the art of the possible" and what's “good enough for now".

When faced with uncertainty, choose options that either bring (or keep) the largest area of the building into use and/or allow activities to continue without locking us into costly (time or resources), irreversible commitments.

Continuity

Prioritise solutions that keep the building operational and in community use.

Plan works in phases so the building can remain open and active, keeping disruption to core community services minimal. If closure is unavoidable, provide temporary alternatives in advance.

Sustainability

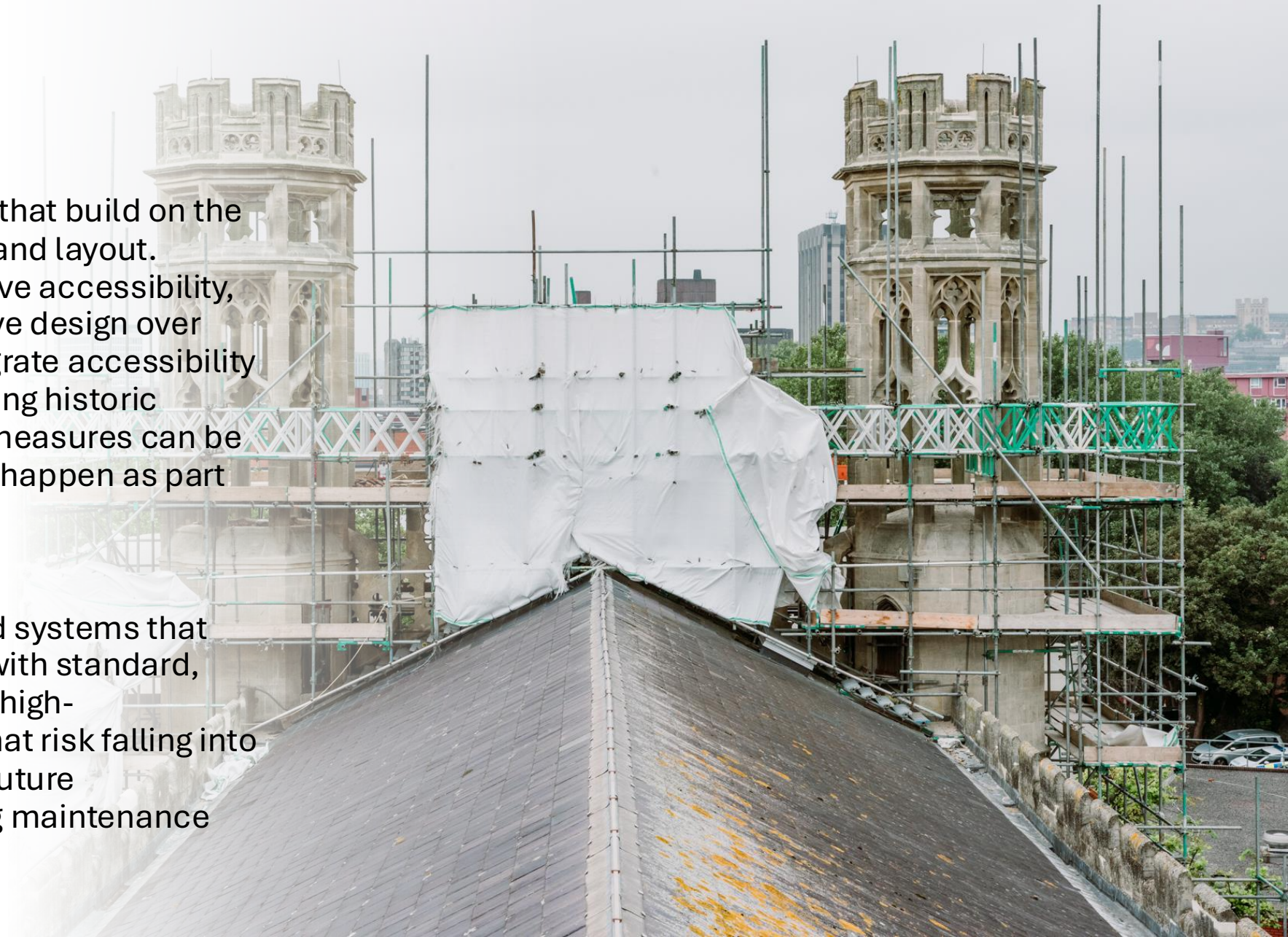
Reuse

Retain distinctive features and original materials where possible, and favour solutions that make the most of what's already here, reusing materials, improving natural light, ventilation, and insulation, rather than relying solely on mechanical or electrical systems.

Adapt

If something must be adapted, do it in a way that avoids erasing the social and cultural history and that tells the he story of the building's evolution that future users can also build upon. Use local, repairable, and recycled resources where possible and design improvements that reduce running costs while respecting the building's heritage.

Longevity

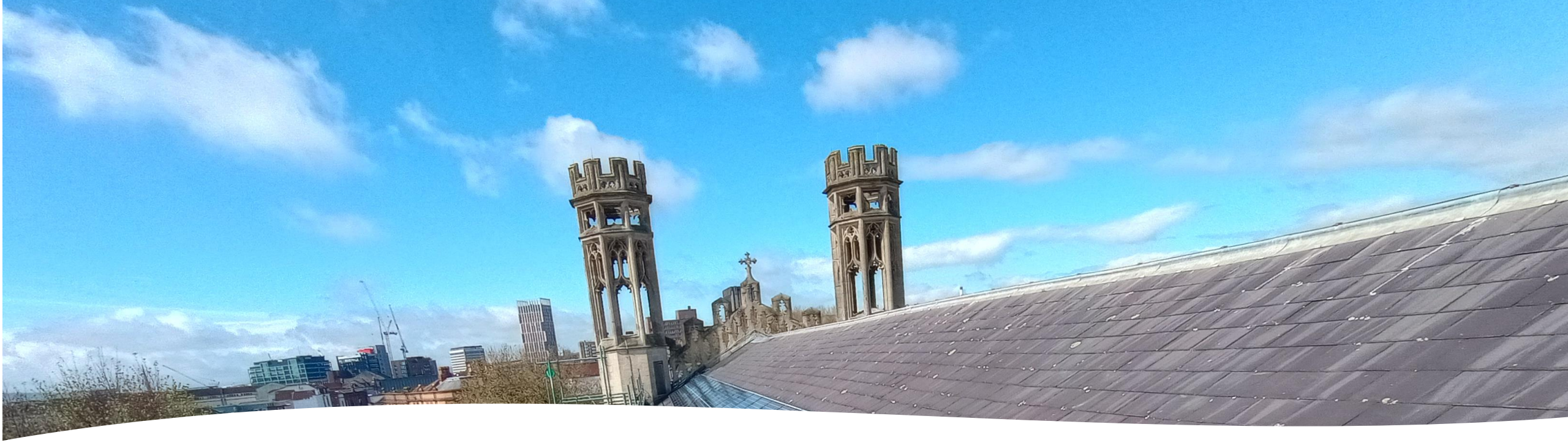


Accessibility

Favour creative adaptations that build on the building's existing character and layout. Prioritise sensory and cognitive accessibility, clear way-finding, and intuitive design over technical interventions. Integrate accessibility into the building's story, reusing historic features where possible, so measures can be sustained, and adaption can happen as part of a continued process.

Maintenance

Choose finishes, fixtures and systems that can be repaired or replaced with standard, locally available parts. Avoid high-maintenance moving parts that risk falling into disrepair and burdening the future organisation with challenging maintenance obligations.



Imagination

Leave space for the unexpected…

Recognise this set of principles cannot anticipate every possibility.

Design with openness, so future communities, needs and ideas can shape the space in ways we cannot yet foresee.

Treat uncertainty as a strength, not a limitation and embrace provocation and challenge as part of good design testing.

Use these principles as an open invitation to be added not just adhered to.

Funders & Supporters