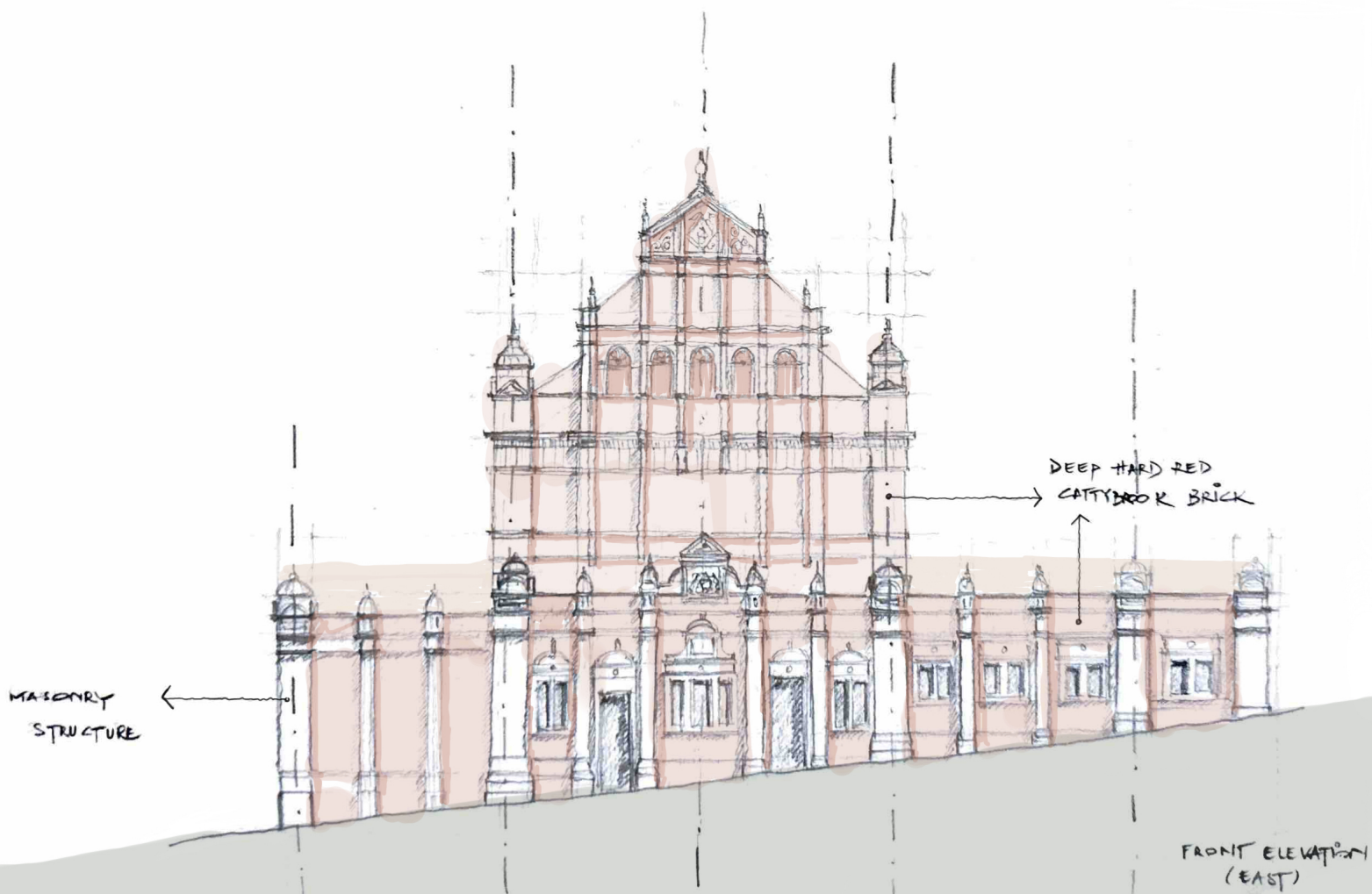


Jacobs Wells Baths

Stage One: Collaborative Design Brief

UWE MArch 2026



Introduction

This booklet has been produced by students of the MArch Architecture programme at the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) as part of the Exploratory Design Studio (Live Project module).

Prepared during Stage 1, the purpose of this document is to define and understand the project brief through research, engagement, and critical analysis of Jacobs Wells Baths. It establishes the context, identifies key opportunities and constraints, and outlines the ambitions that will guide the subsequent Stage 2 individual design development work.

The work has been undertaken in collaboration with Local Learning and is intended to support and inform community-focused outcomes. The document reflects an exploratory process of investigation and dialogue, forming the foundation for future design proposals.

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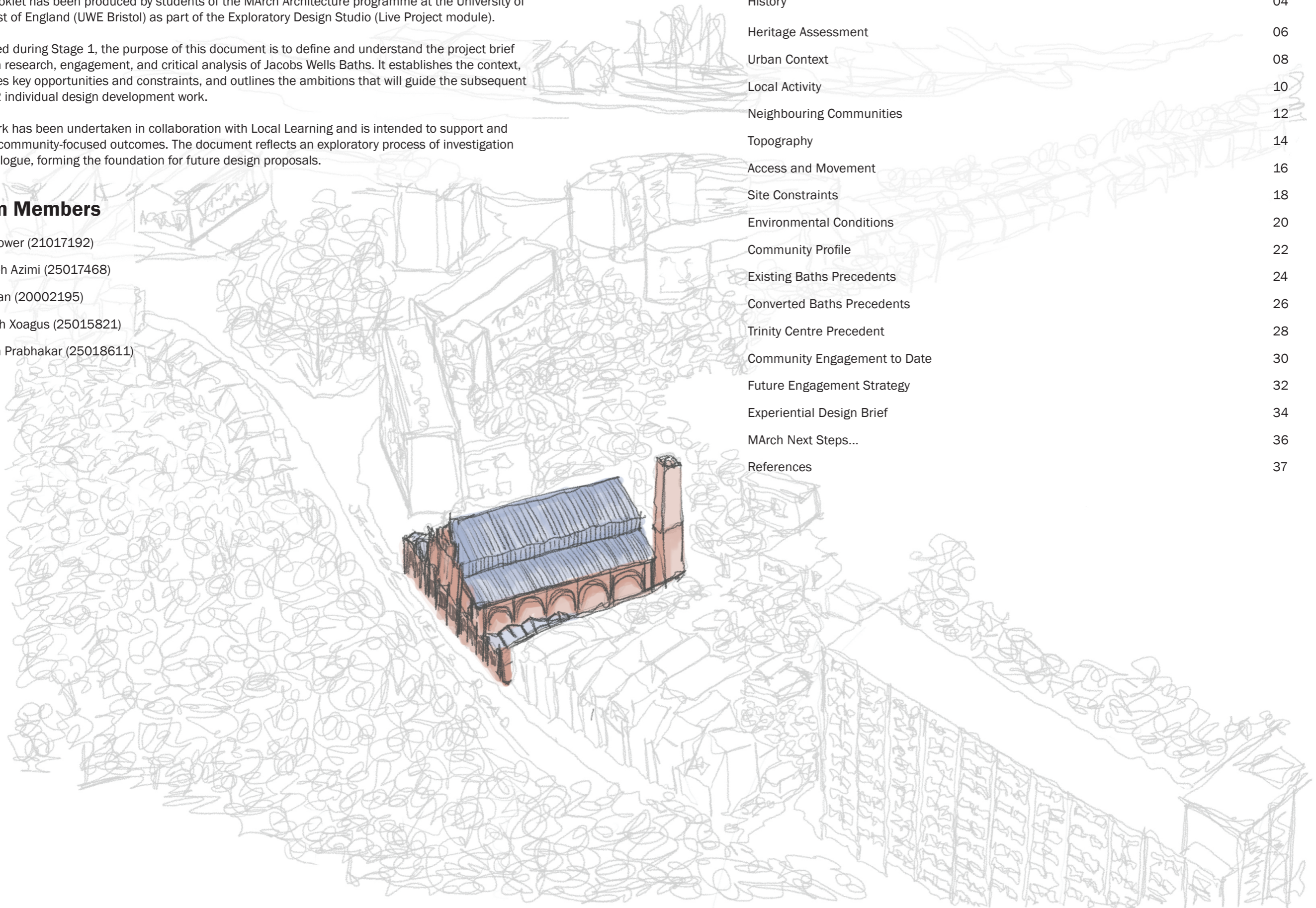
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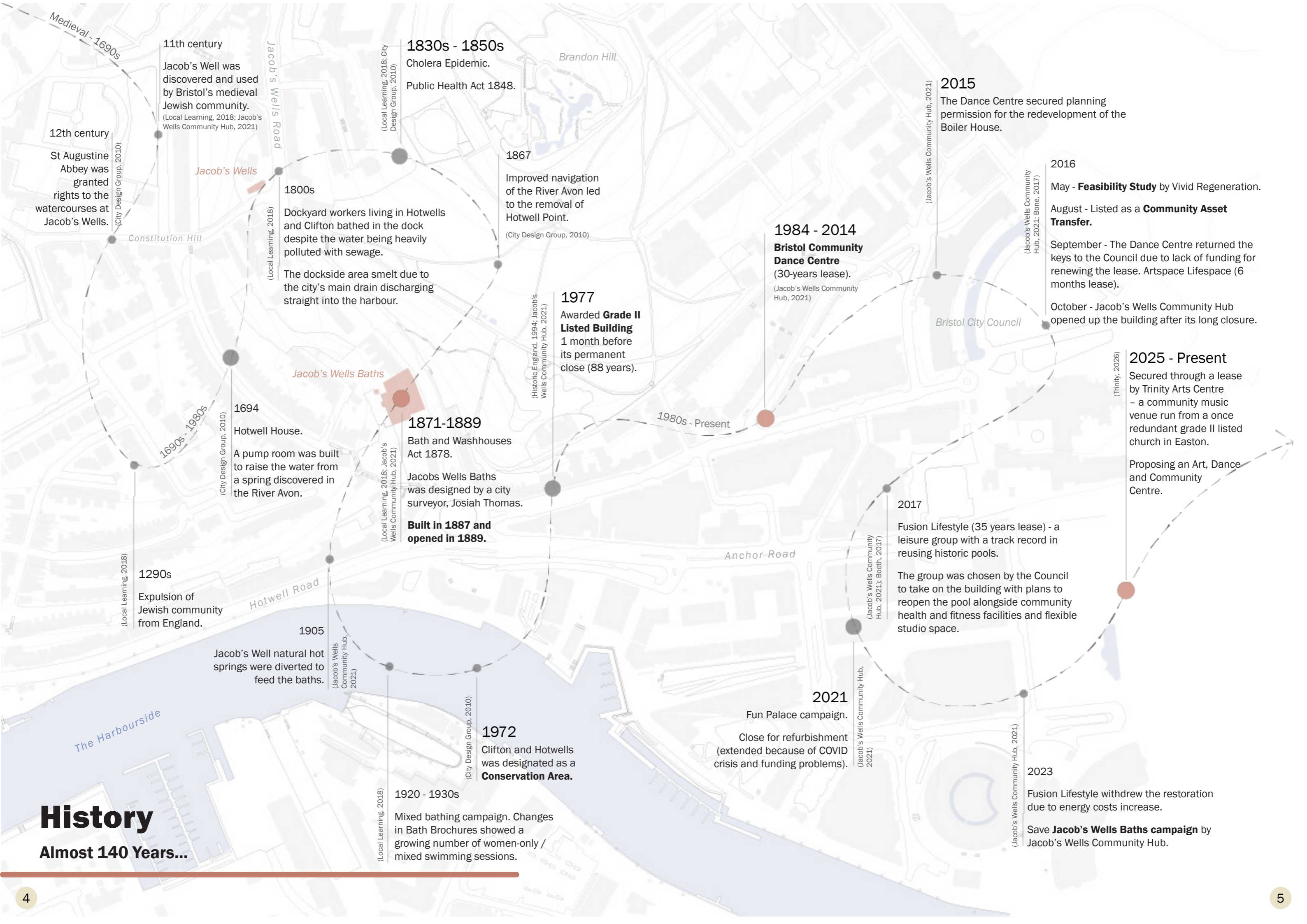
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History

Almost 140 Years...



11th century
Jacob's Well was discovered and used by Bristol's medieval Jewish community.
(Local Learning, 2018; Jacob's Wells Community Hub, 2021)

12th century
St Augustine Abbey was granted rights to the watercourses at Jacob's Wells.
(City Design Group, 2010)

1830s - 1850s
Cholera Epidemic.
Public Health Act 1848.
(Local Learning, 2018; City Design Group, 2010)

1800s
Dockyard workers living in Hotwells and Clifton bathed in the dock despite the water being heavily polluted with sewage.
(Local Learning, 2018)

1867
Improved navigation of the River Avon led to the removal of Hotwell Point.
(City Design Group, 2010)

The dockside area smelt due to the city's main drain discharging straight into the harbour.

1984 - 2014
Bristol Community Dance Centre
(30-years lease).
(Jacob's Wells Community Hub, 2021)

2015
The Dance Centre secured planning permission for the redevelopment of the Boiler House.

2016
May - **Feasibility Study** by Vivid Regeneration.

August - Listed as a **Community Asset Transfer**.

September - The Dance Centre returned the keys to the Council due to lack of funding for renewing the lease. Artspace Lifespace (6 months lease).

October - Jacob's Wells Community Hub opened up the building after its long closure.

1977
Awarded **Grade II Listed Building** 1 month before its permanent close (88 years).
(Historic England, 1994; Jacob's Wells Community Hub, 2021)

1871-1889
Bath and Washhouses Act 1878.
Jacobs Wells Baths was designed by a city surveyor, Josiah Thomas.

Built in 1887 and opened in 1889.

1694
Hotwell House.
A pump room was built to raise the water from a spring discovered in the River Avon.
(City Design Group, 2010)

1690s - 1980s

1290s
Expulsion of Jewish community from England.
(Local Learning, 2018)

1905
Jacob's Well natural hot springs were diverted to feed the baths.
(Jacob's Wells Community Hub, 2021)

1972
Clifton and Hotwells was designated as a **Conservation Area**.
(City Design Group, 2010)

1920 - 1930s
Mixed bathing campaign. Changes in Bath Brochures showed a growing number of women-only / mixed swimming sessions.
(Local Learning, 2018)

2021
Fun Palace campaign.
Close for refurbishment (extended because of COVID crisis and funding problems).
(Jacob's Wells Community Hub, 2021)

2017
Fusion Lifestyle (35 years lease) - a leisure group with a track record in reusing historic pools.
The group was chosen by the Council to take on the building with plans to reopen the pool alongside community health and fitness facilities and flexible studio space.
(Jacob's Wells Community Hub, 2021; Booth, 2017)

2025 - Present
Secured through a lease by Trinity Arts Centre - a community music venue run from a once redundant grade II listed church in Easton.
(Trinity, 2026)

Proposing an Art, Dance and Community Centre.

2023
Fusion Lifestyle withdrew the restoration due to energy costs increase.
Save Jacob's Wells Baths campaign by Jacob's Wells Community Hub.
(Jacob's Wells Community Hub, 2021)

Heritage Assessment

Architectural Value and Material Character

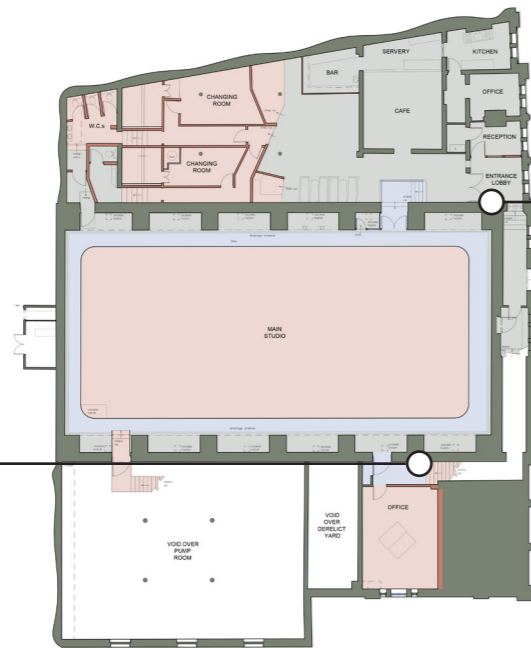
Archive Visit

During a visit to Bristol Archives on 5th February 2026, the original building specification (Archive ref. BA/11076) was located. This provided the team with valuable insight into the building's original construction and materials (Bristol Archives, 2026).

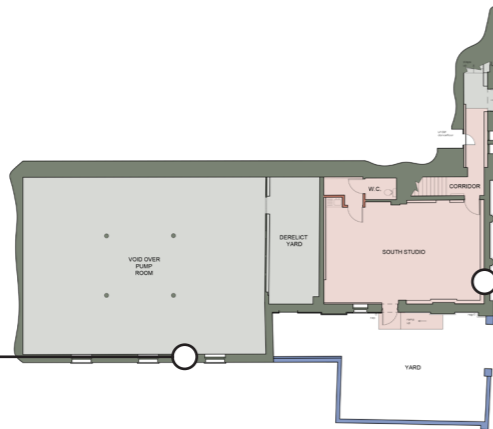


Oak

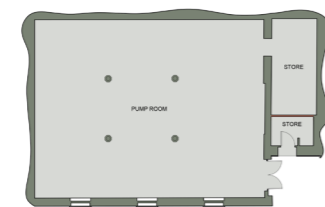
As discussed in the archive specification the oak work was oiled with fine linseed oil.



Main Studio Plan



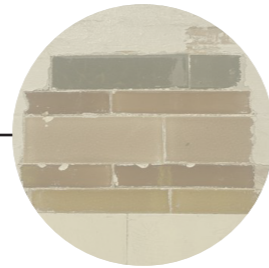
South Studio Plan



Pump Room Plan

Mortar

Mortar composed of one part burnt Keynsham lime (below ground brown lime, above ground white lime) from Keynsham Lias.



Glazed Bricks

From a site visit it was noted that glazed tiles in various colours lined some of the interior walls of the baths. From the specification the main swimming pool was to be lined with porcelain plain white tiles. The ceramics were supplied by Rufford & Co.



Brick

The bricks are 9" x 4½" x 3" Cattybrook. They were supplied from a clay pit near the village of Almondsbury. The bricks were laid in Flemish bond. It has been assumed from plans and site visit that the walls are at least w1 and half brick walls (approx. 330mm).

Key Takeaways

- Preserve the existing materials and finishes wherever possible
- Use lime mortar for all additional or repair masonry work
- Specify new materials that are locally sourced within the Bristol area
- Consider incorporating the project's material palette into community engagement workshops.

Key

- Original
- Late 20th Century
- Early 20th Century

Communal Value

Exceptional Significance:

- Long history as a public facility serving local people
- Role in promoting **public health**, recreation, and physical activity
- Association with Jacob's Well as a shared water source

High Significance:

- Continued public space as a dance and community centre
- Strong community identity associated with the baths and dance
- Community efforts to protect and reuse the building

Moderate Significance:

- Use by wider Bristol population beyond immediate neighbourhood

Low Significance:

- Short-term or specialist uses with limited public engagement

Aesthetic Value

Exceptional Significance:

- Principal street façade in Queen Anne Revival style
- Large pool hall volume and spatial scale
- Roof lanterns contributing to character and light quality
- Original brickwork, terracotta dressings, and decorative details

High Significance:

- Gables, chimneys, and roof form
- Original structural elements such as roof trusses and columns
- Relationship between central hall and side wings

Moderate Significance:

- Alterations added during conversion that do not change the main space

Low Significance:

- Modern partitions and surface treatments
- Non-original decorative elements

* This assessment draws on the Donald Inall Associates Conservation Management Plan (2015). While the report informed the identification of significant elements, the grading and conclusions presented here represent the student's independent analysis.

Historical Value

Exceptional Significance:

- Purpose-built Victorian public baths
- Evidence of public health reforms and municipal welfare provision
- Direct association with Jacob's Well water source

High Significance:

- Example of 19th-century civic infrastructure
- Shows shift from hygiene provision to recreational swimming
- Part of Bristol's wider system of public baths

Moderate Significance:

- Closure in 1977 showing decline of public bath use
- 20th-century alterations reflecting changing needs

Low Significance:

- Minor later changes with limited historical importance

Evidential Value

Exceptional Significance:

- Overall layout showing original bathhouse design
- Central pool hall structure
- Roof lanterns and environmental systems

High Significance:

- Structural elements such as columns, trusses, tanks, and pipework
- Evidence of water supply, heating, and ventilation systems
- Remains of bathing facilities

Moderate Significance:

- Later adaptations that show how the building was reused
- Insertions that still allow original plan to be read

Low Significance:

- Modern services and non-structural additions

Key Takeaways

- Significant spaces and features should be retained and enhanced
- Underused or altered areas offer opportunities for new interventions

Urban Context

Historic paths, roads and buildings

Hotwells

Hotwells developed in the 18th century as a fashionable spa district centred on the Hot Well spring. The 19th century brought dockside industry, dense housing, and civic infrastructure such as Jacobs Wells Baths. After wartime damage and post-industrial decline, late-20th-century regeneration reshaped it into a mixed residential and cultural waterfront neighbourhood (Waite, 2002).

Brandon Hill

For centuries, Brandon Hill has functioned as a civic meeting ground. Medieval hermits lived in seclusion there, while 18th–19th century reformists and Chartists gathered for political protest. Soldiers trained in wartime (Local Learning, 2018). During the twentieth century it became an informal LGBTQ+ meeting place, reinforcing its long-standing social significance.

Canon Marsh Gas Works

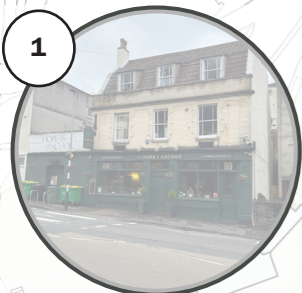
Originally medieval land owned by Augustinian canons, was industrialised after the Floating Harbour's construction in 1809, becoming home to dock warehouses and gas works producing coal gas for Bristol. During the Bristol Blitz, the harbour and surrounding industry were heavily bombed before post-war decline and later regeneration transformed the area (Nevell, 1993).

Key

- Site
- Conservation area
- Canon Marsh
- Brandon Hill

Local Activity

Commercial Uses



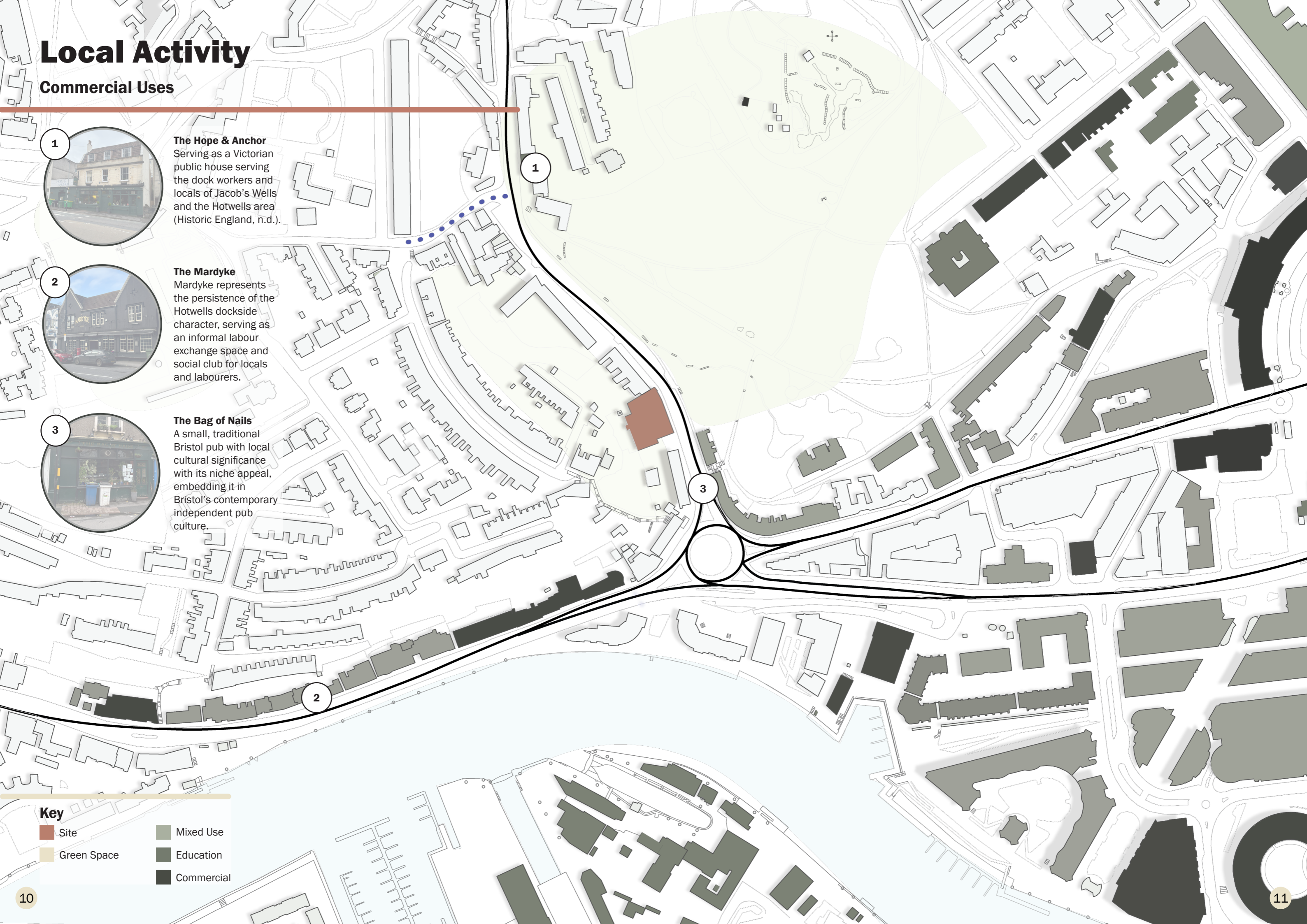
The Hope & Anchor
Serving as a Victorian public house serving the dock workers and locals of Jacob's Wells and the Hotwells area (Historic England, n.d.).



The Mardyke
Mardyke represents the persistence of the Hotwells dockside character, serving as an informal labour exchange space and social club for locals and labourers.



The Bag of Nails
A small, traditional Bristol pub with local cultural significance with its niche appeal, embedding it in Bristol's contemporary independent pub culture.



Key

- Site
- Green Space
- Mixed Use
- Education
- Commercial

Neighbouring Communities

Housing and Education



Brandon House
11 storey tower block council owned. It was built in 1959-60 within Bristol's post-war redevelopment period (UK Housing Wiki, 2025).



St Peter's House
Represents post-war institutional architecture and was previously associated with the Catholic community. Now serves as council housing.



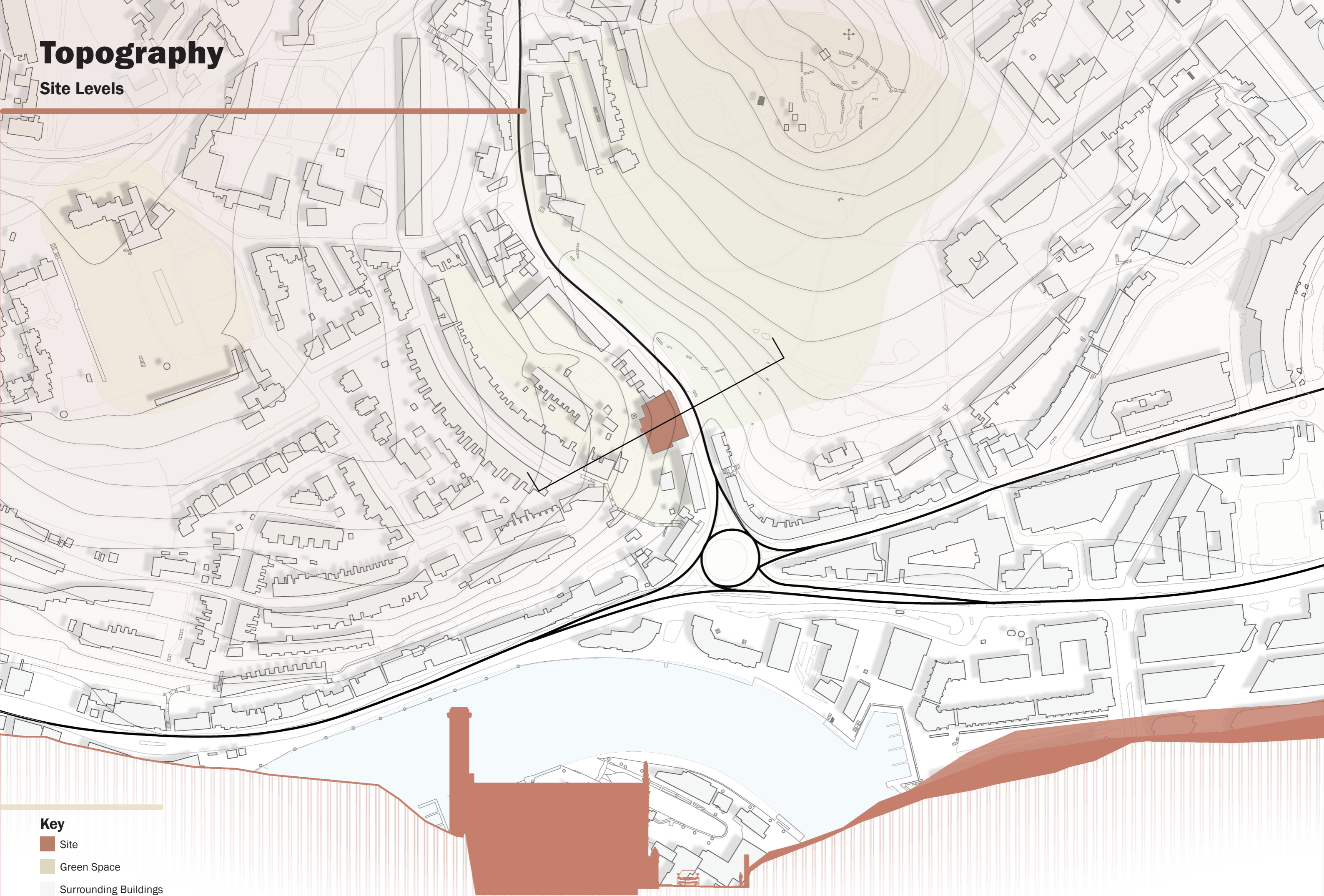
City of Bristol College
Evolved from municipal technical schools established to support the city's industrial economy to service, creative and technical sectors.

Key

- Site
- Green Space
- Mixed Use
- Education
- Commercial

Topography

Site Levels



Key

- Site
- Green Space
- Surrounding Buildings

Access and Movement

Pedestrian, Vehicular and Public Transport Links

- Despite its historic and civic value, Jacobs Wells Baths does not assert a strong visual presence within the streetscape
- The primary entrance lacks spatial transition or threshold articulation.
- There is no clearly designated pedestrian crossing aligned with the main entrance
- The site has minimal way-finding or interpretive signage to communicate its location
- Although geographically close to Bristol's Harbourside, the pedestrian route between Jacobs Wells Baths and the waterfront is indirect and visually unclear
- The building functions as a stand-alone entity rather than part of an integrated civic network. It lacks strong spatial dialogue

Community Hub

Community advocated for 4 years to have a zebra crossing added to Jacob's Wells Road (Jacobs Wells Community Hub, 2021a).

Jacob's Wells Baths Road

Bus Stop Services
505,B1,U2

Anchor Road

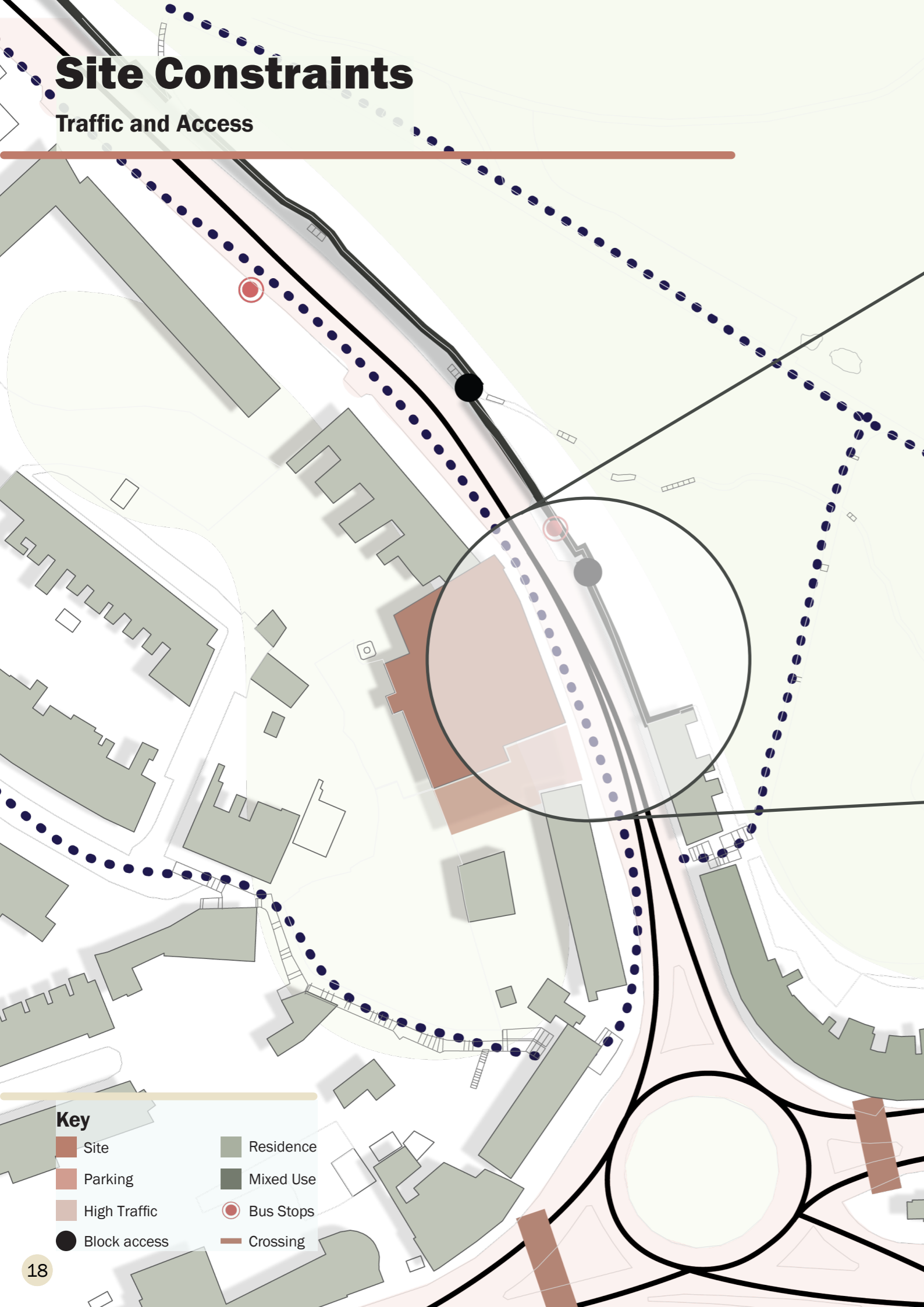
Bus Stop Services
9,41,X1

Key

- Site
- Bus Stops
- Pedestrian Corridor
- Road Access
- Pedestrian
- Crossing

Site Constraints

Traffic and Access



- During morning and evening peak hours, traffic volume increases significantly due to commuter flows, school drop-off activity (Cathedral Primary School), and college movement (City of Bristol College).
- Footpaths along sections of Jacob's Wells Road and Hotwell Road are constrained by steep topography, historic building frontages built close to the carriageway, limited setback space that restricts pedestrian flow and prevents informal use (seating, gathering, or spill-out activity).
- Formal crossing points are sparse and often not aligned with natural desire lines between the different points of interest
- On-street parking is restricted and highly competitive.
- Disabled parking provision is minimal relative to potential civic use of Jacobs Wells Baths. The absence of nearby Blue Badge bays reduces accessibility



Key Takeaways

- Prioritise pedestrian access and connections
- Focus on thresholds to clarify arrival
- Make the building a destination with a deliberate journey

Environmental Conditions

Light, Wind, Noise and Site Constraints

Noise

The site lies on the **edge of Bristol's Clean Air Zone**. Traffic emissions and noise levels are highest along the road frontage and towards Hotwell Road (Bristol City Council, n.d.).

Sun & Shadows

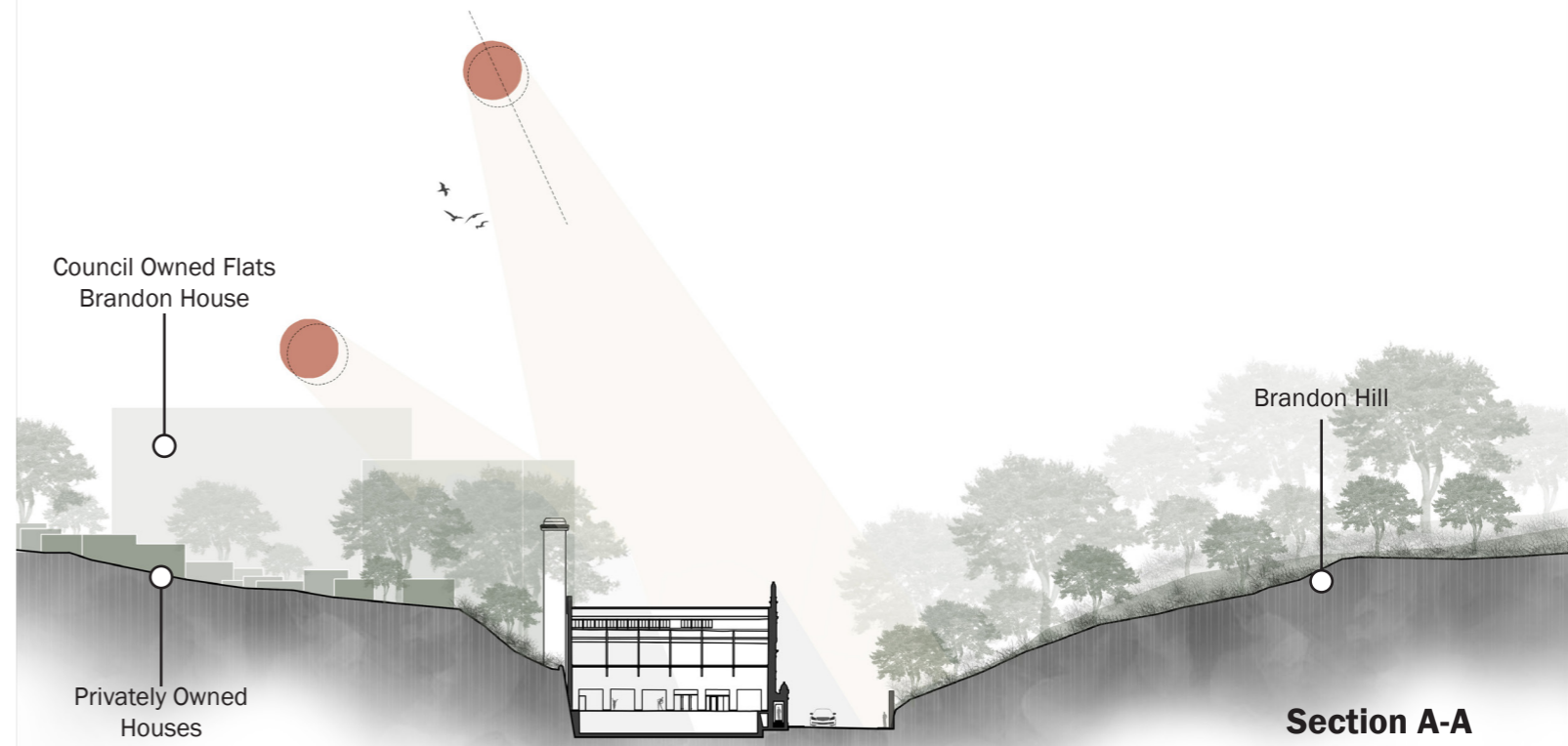
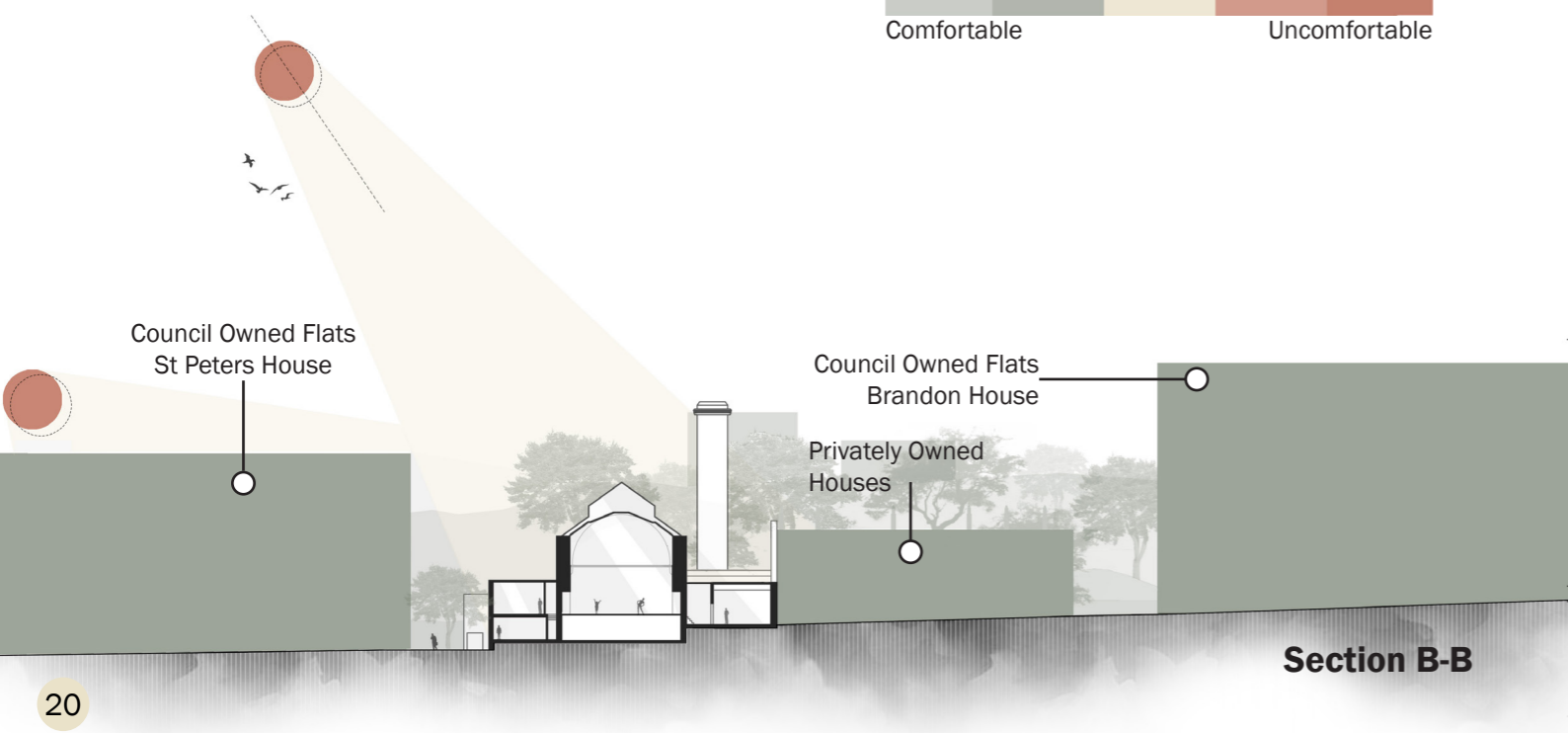
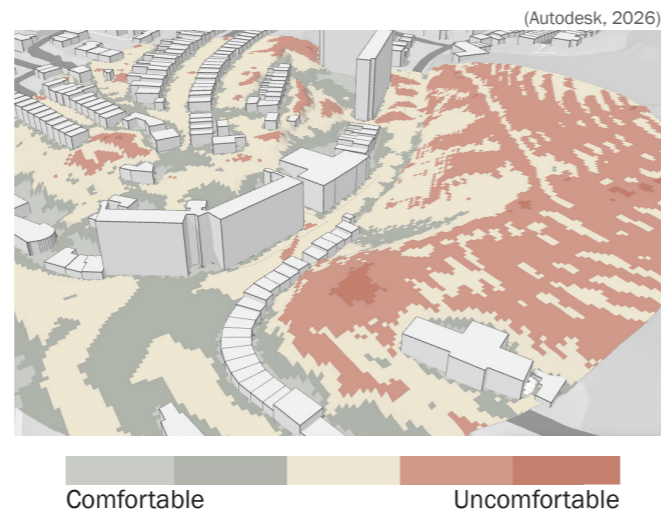


Solar studies indicate that direct daylight primarily enters from above through the roof lantern, with surrounding built mass limiting low-angle winter sun at lower levels. The main pool volume remains the most consistently illuminated space within the building (Shademap.app, 2026).

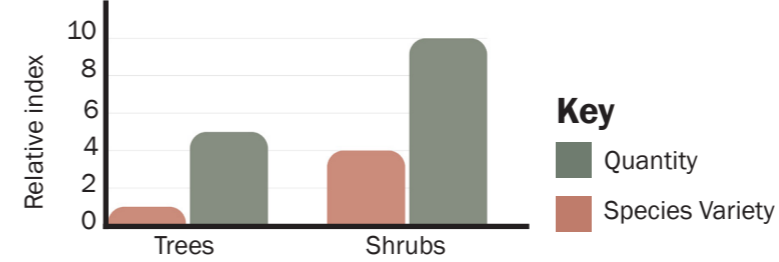
Wind

Prevailing winds predominantly come from the south-west, with occasional north-easterly winds. Wind is funnelled along Jacob's Wells Road increasing the **gust at ground level**. At an adjacent road and behind the site the experience is much calmer and sheltered (Weather and Climate, 2024).

The site gains relative protection from surrounding urban mass. The more protected lower areas may be better suited to entrances or informal outdoor use, while exposed edges may require buffering through planting or built intervention.



Biodiversity



While adjacent to Brandon Hill Nature Reserve, the site itself has **limited internal biodiversity** due to hard surfaces and building coverage.

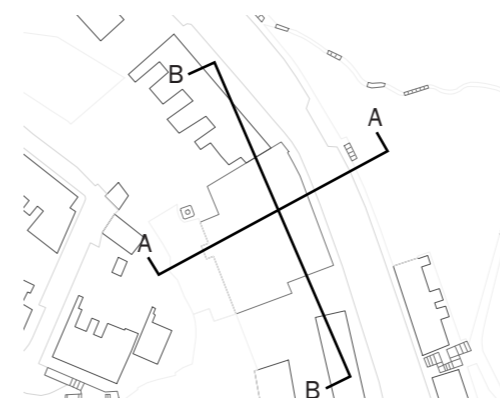
Existing vegetation is dominated in quantity by unmanaged shrubs (Elder, Blackthorn, Buddleia, etc.), with secondary **sycamore trees** (5 Mature trees) forming the only other habitat type (Bristol.gov.uk, 2023).

Radon



The site falls within a **10–30%** radon probability area, requiring a **full radon protection** to be considered under Approved Document C.

This is particularly relevant given the proposed youth use and regular occupancy, and will need to be addressed as part of the design development (UK Health Security Agency, 2022).



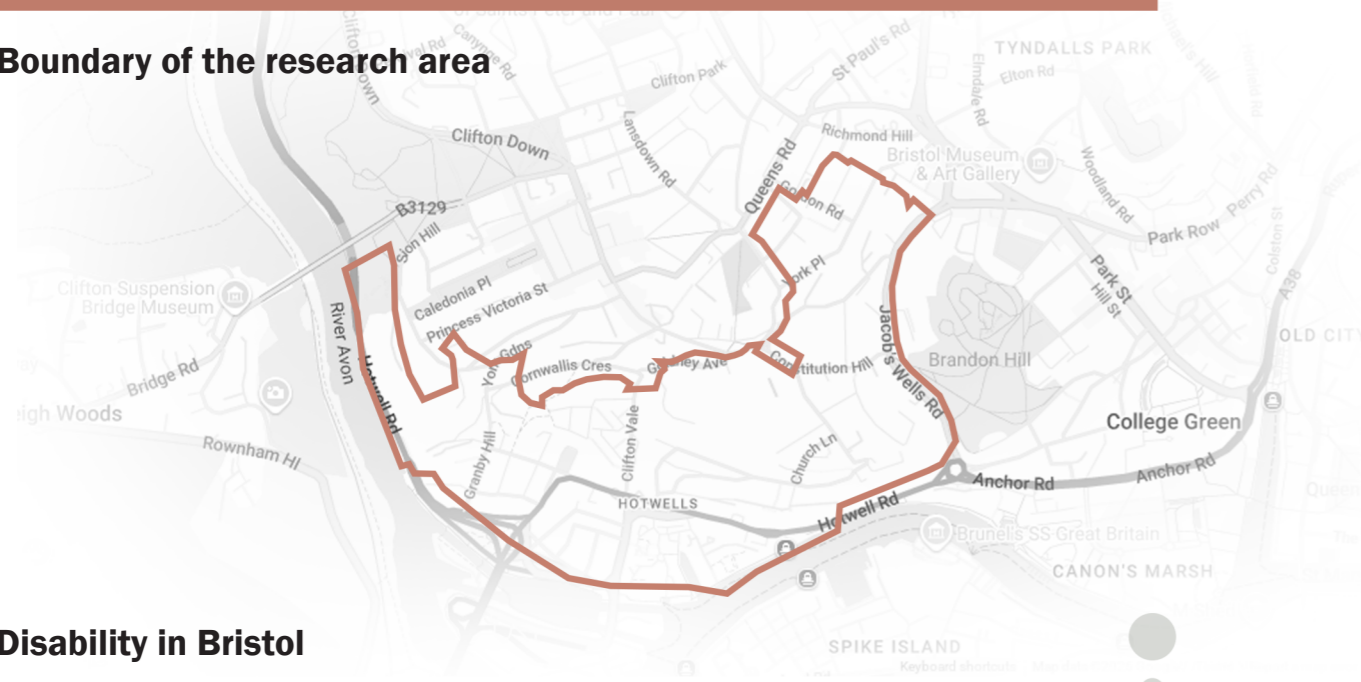
Key Takeaways

- Light-dependent activities should be prioritised in spaces with roof lanterns.
- Quiet spaces ideally positioned away from the road-facing façade.
- There is an opportunity for ecological enhancement within the small amount of outdoor space available. For example: Oak trees for long term canopy, Silver birch although they have light canopy they are fast growing.

Community Profile

Hotwells and Harbourside

Boundary of the research area



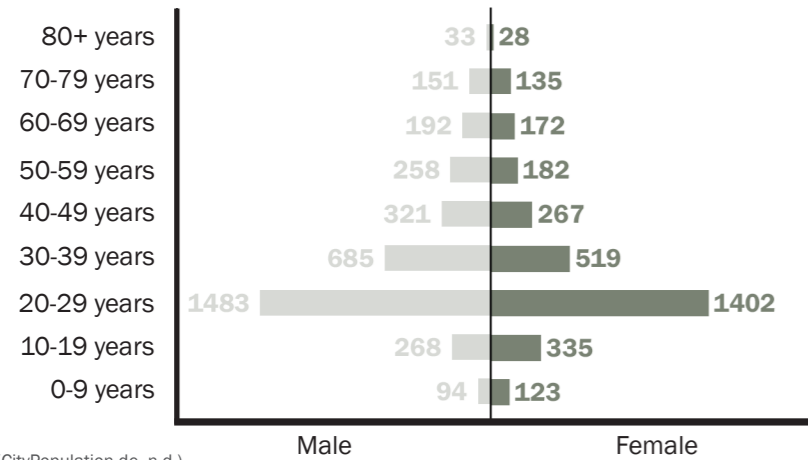
Disability in Bristol

- **3.7%** of people are disabled under the Equality Act: Day-to-day activities limited a lot
- **11.1%** of people are disabled under the Equality Act: Day-to-day activities limited a little
- **8.6%** of people are not disabled under the Equality Act: Has long-term physical or mental health condition but day-to-day activities are not limited
- **76.5%** of people are not disabled under the Equality Act: No long-term physical or mental health conditions



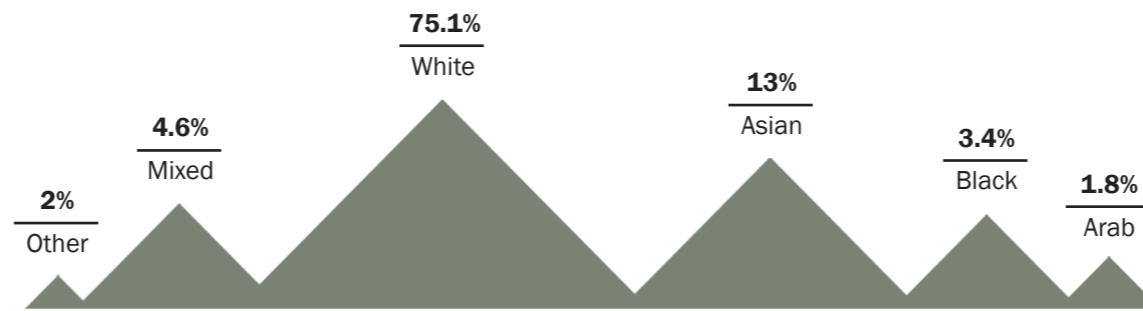
(CensusData.uk, n.d.)

Age Distribution



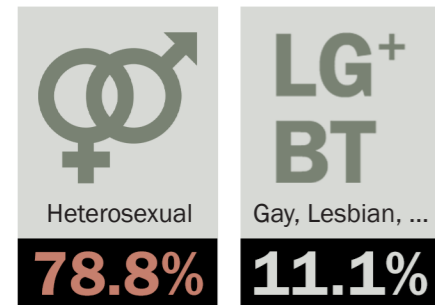
(CityPopulation.de, n.d.)

Ethnic Group



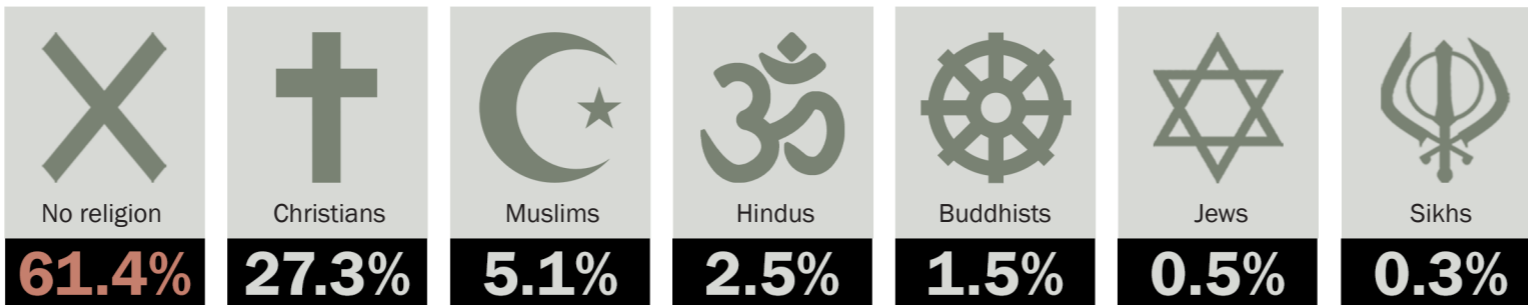
(CityPopulation.de, n.d.)

Sexuality *



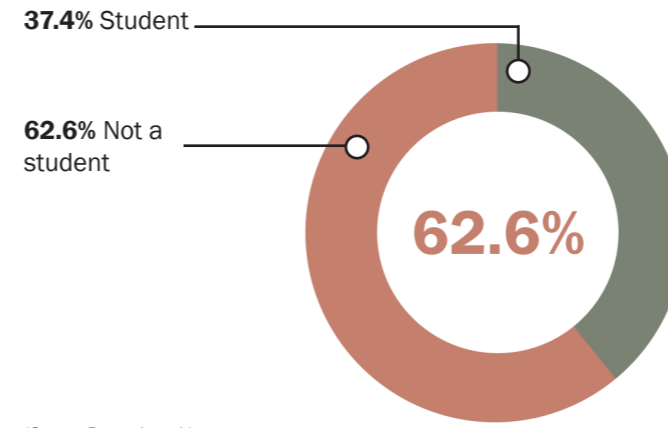
(Office for National Statistics, 2023)

Religion *



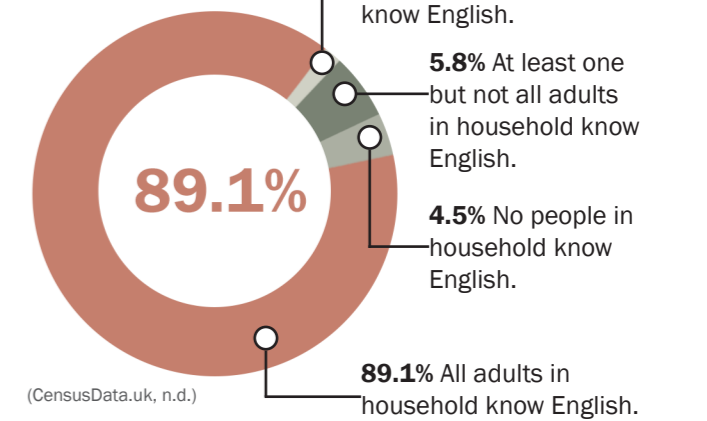
(CityPopulation.de, n.d.)

Students



(CensusData.uk, n.d.)

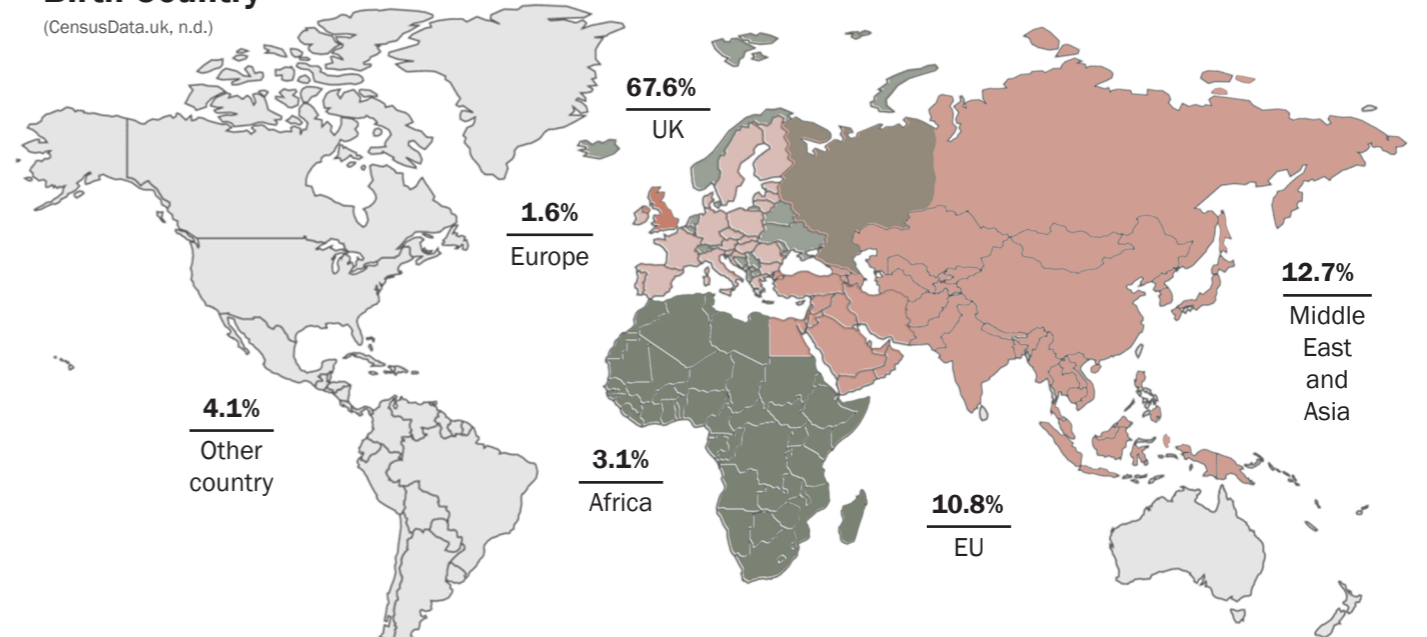
Language



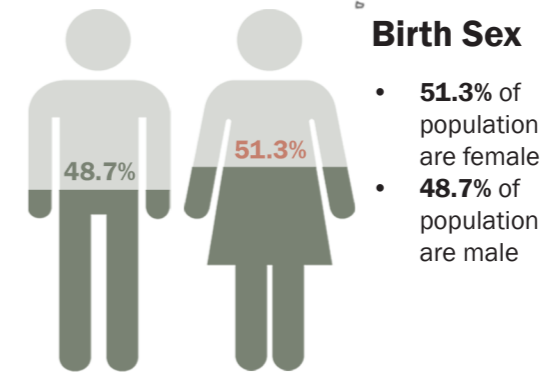
(CensusData.uk, n.d.)

Birth Country

(CensusData.uk, n.d.)



Birth Sex



(CensusData.uk, n.d.)

Key Takeaways

- The population is majority young people and students
- There is a diverse range of cultures, and their different needs must be considered.
- All disabilities should be accounted for in the design, including physical, sensory, cognitive and neurodiverse needs.

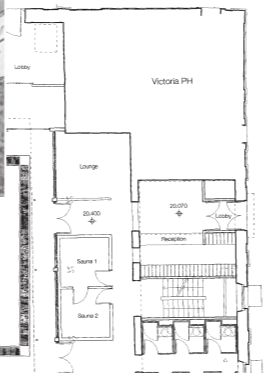
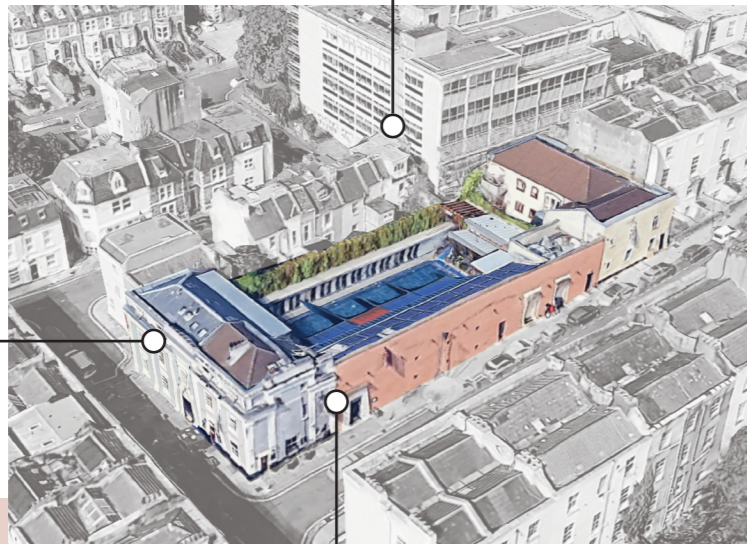
* Totals may not reach 100% due to 'prefer not to say' responses.

Existing Baths Precedents

Clifton Lido

Value to the Community

During the 1960s and 1970s, Clifton Lido was a landmark destination and an important social junction for the local community (Watershed, 2019). When the building was later threatened with demolition, community advocacy played a central role in securing its protection, and it was subsequently designated as a Grade II listed structure (Historic England, n.d.).



Materiality

Constructed in ashlar limestone, the building expresses a sense of Victorian permanence and civic restraint (Historic England, n.d.). Its masonry walls enclose a private courtyard pool, while contemporary glazed insertions introduce transparency, creating a deliberate contrast between historic solidity and modern architectural intervention (Marshall and Kendon, 2024).



Accessibility

The redevelopment of Clifton Lido, despite its limited internal space, creates a clear sense of arrival and smooth movement toward the pool and restaurant (Historic England, n.d.). Levelled access allows those with mobility constraints to navigate parts of the building; however, the site remains only partially accessible due to its historic layout and retained architectural features (Clifton Lido, n.d.).

Bristol South Baths

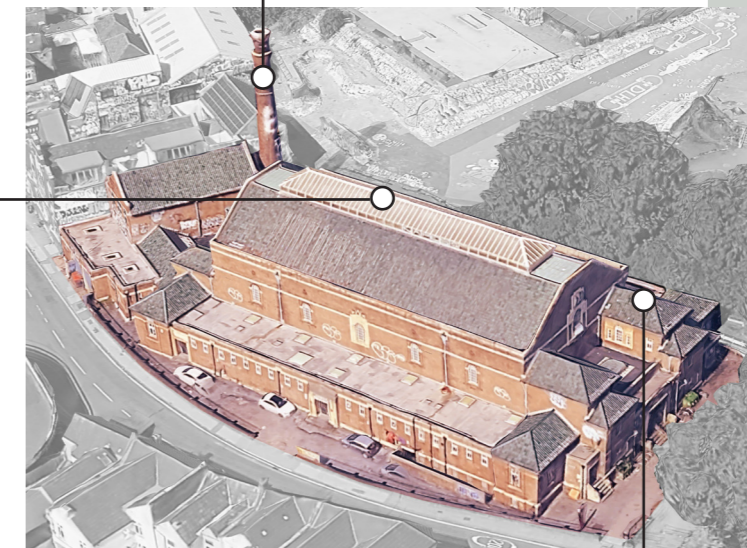
Roof Lantern

Like Jacobs Wells Baths, Bristol South Baths features a ridge roof lantern along with additional roof lights elsewhere in the building. However, due to deterioration, most of these roof lights have been lost due to repetitive roof replacement works (Historic England, 2026).



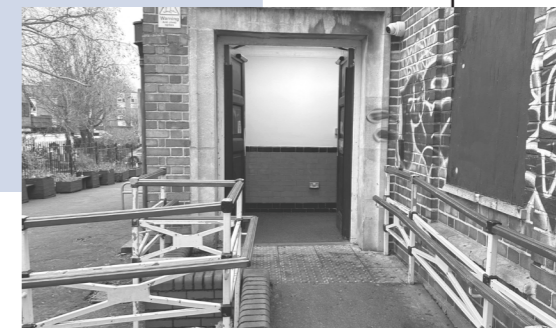
Community Respect

Because the building has been closed several times, it has become a prime target for graffiti. This suggests that the community no longer values or respects the building in the way it once did.



Accessibility

To provide accessible entry to the building, a ramp has been added at the former slipper baths entrance. While this improves access for more users, it unintentionally separates them from the opportunity to use the grand main entrance.



Converted Baths Precedents

North Baths

Roof Lantern

Bristol North Baths retains and actively utilises its original ridge roof lantern. Despite the insertion of an additional intermediate floor, translucent glazing panels have been integrated within the new floor structure, allowing natural light to penetrate to lower levels (Bristol, 2019).



Business Model

At Bristol North Baths, the former main swimming pool block and principal entrance volume (dashed blue line) have been adapted into commercial office space, forming the building's primary economic driver.

The former slipper baths wing has been converted into a public library, hosting children's story sessions, LEGO activities, and adult reading groups (Bristol, 2019).

Accessibility

Ramp access has been introduced adjacent to the main entrance, improving inclusive access. However, the ramp is partially concealed behind a solid metal gate, likely for security purposes (Bristol, 2019).

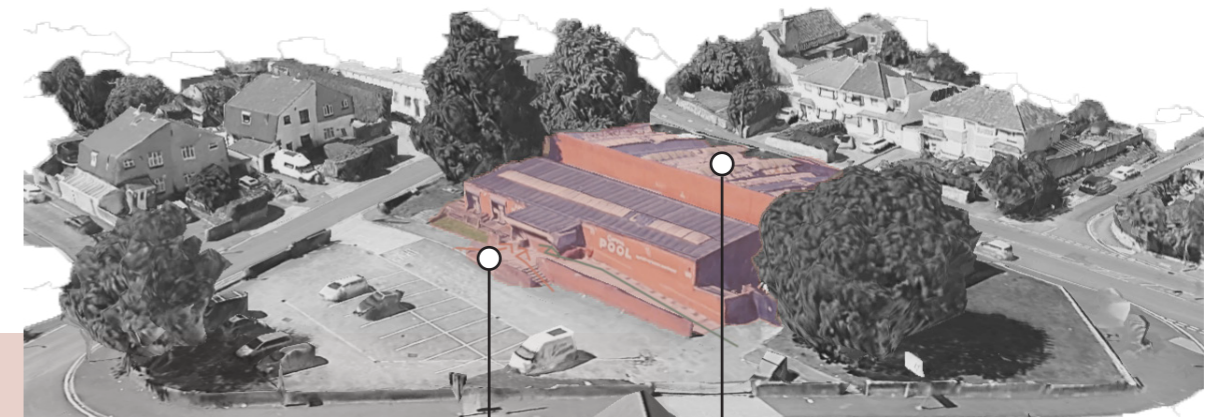


Bishopsworth Pool



Re-purpose

Like Jacobs Wells Baths, this pool became derelict and unused, initially slated for potential demolition. Being closed because of the new Leisure Centre in Hengrove Park, the transformation to a skate park has saved the building. From youth to wider community, the space was a new success from working with the community (Alexander, 2015; Campus Skateboarding, 2026).



Threshold

"It's right in the middle of the community and you can come here whenever you want."

A new ramp was recently added to provide full accessibility to the main entrance (Alexander, 2015).



Daylight

Strip of skylights from the roof remain from the former usage (Hop King, 2022).

Trinity Centre Precedent

Programme Shift and Spatial Continuity

Programme Shift

In both cases, the original use declined, but the architecture remained spatially powerful. Trinity closed as church attendance reduced, and public baths declined as domestic facilities became standard. The buildings did not fail architecturally; their social function changed (Trinity Bristol, n.d.).

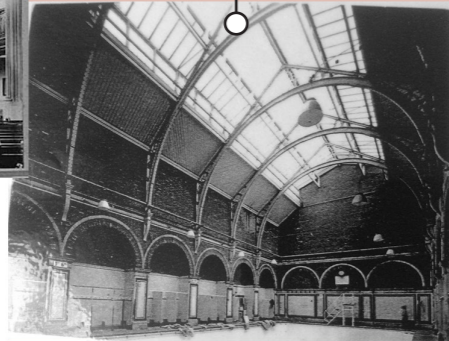
Generous v Constrained

Trinity occupies a substantial area with open ground surrounding the building, allowing greater flexibility for circulation, access routes, and external gathering space. The building is set back within its plot rather than directly constrained by the street edge. In contrast, Jacobs Wells Baths sits tightly within its urban block, with minimal surrounding space. This difference significantly affects how arrival, accessibility, servicing, and potential parking must be approached (gcp Chartered Architects, 2019) (ph3 design, 2015).



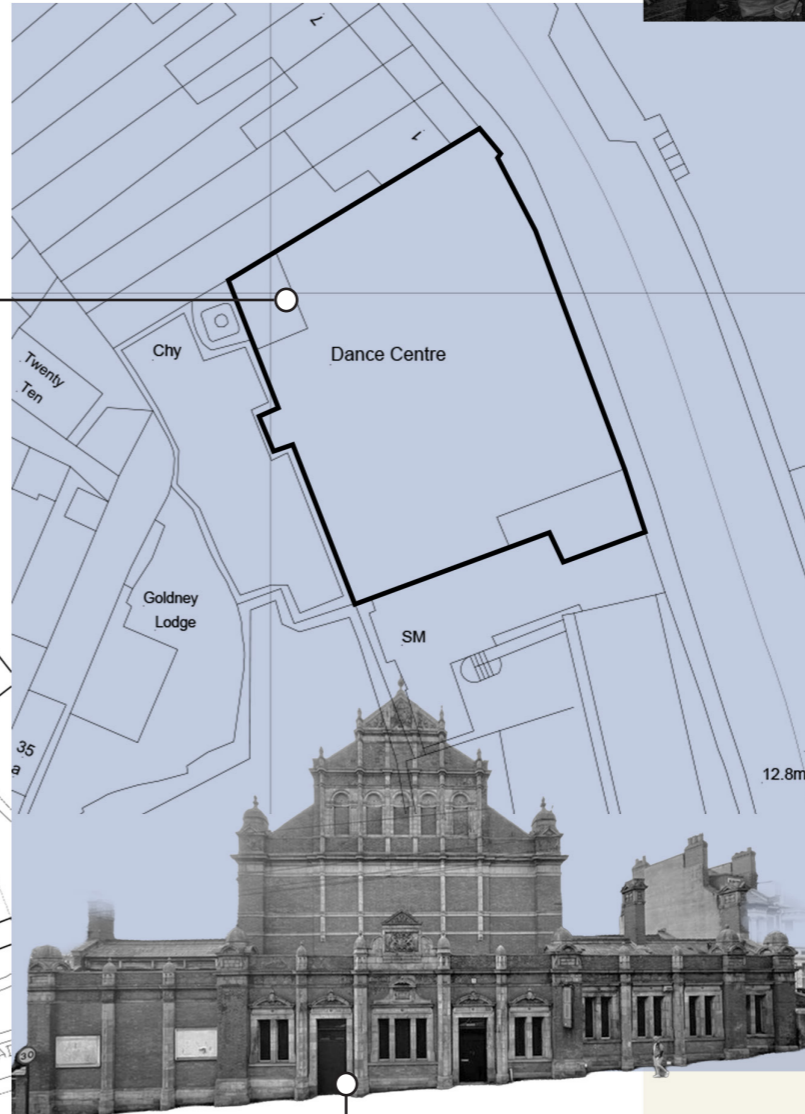
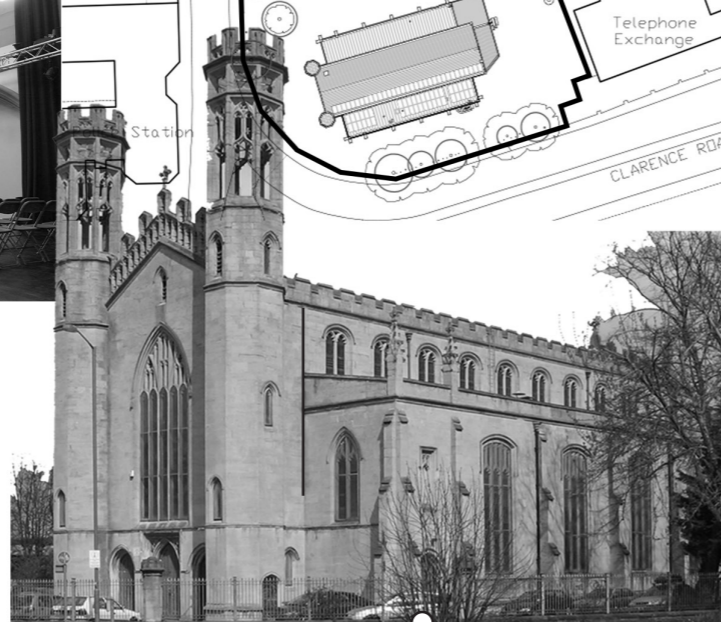
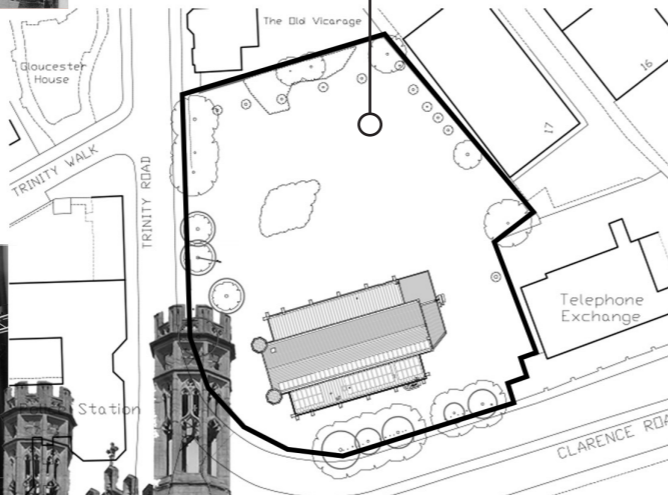
New Users, Same Building

Following closure, Trinity redefined its civic role through performance, workshops, and community events. The monumental interior became a platform for collective cultural activity. Jacobs Wells Baths can similarly reinterpret its social purpose while retaining its spatial identity (Trinity Bristol, n.d.).



Central Volume

Trinity's adaptation retained the hierarchy and vertical scale of the nave, preserving its collective presence. The removal of later masonry blocking the West window restored clarity and proportion. Similarly, the pool hall at Jacobs Wells Baths defines the building's identity. Its scale and openness should remain legible within any future intervention (Trinity Bristol, n.d.).



Public Civic Origins

Both Trinity Church and Jacobs Wells Baths were constructed as civic responses to urban need. Trinity served a rapidly expanding industrial parish population in 19th-century Bristol, while Jacobs Wells Baths addressed public health inequality through collective access to hygiene and swimming. Neither was conceived as a private institution; both functioned as shared civic infrastructure embedded within their neighbourhoods (Trinity Bristol, n.d.).

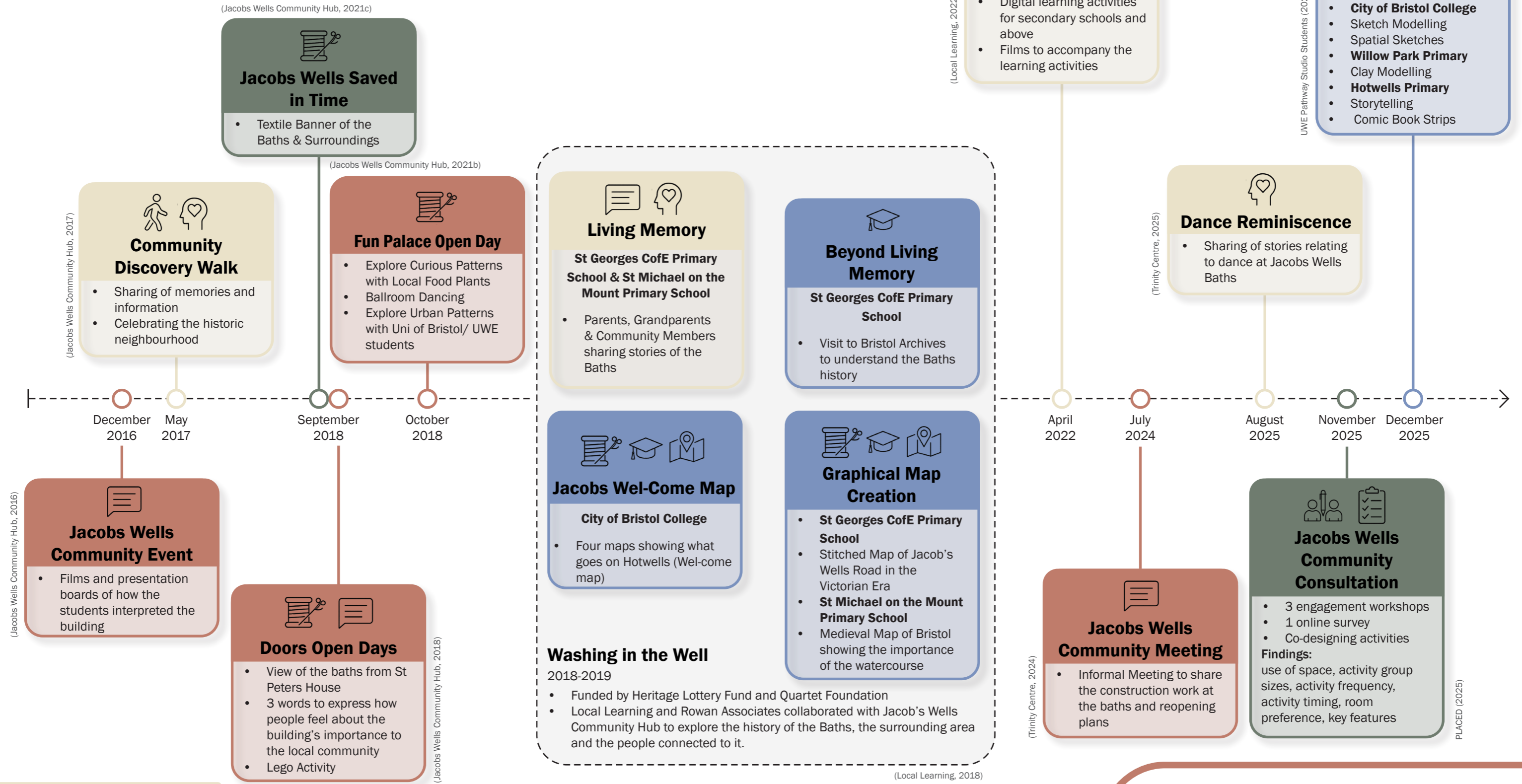
Alteration and Intervention

At Trinity, later additions were removed and replaced with lightweight glass elements, restoring clarity to the original structure. New insertions remain distinct and subordinate to the historic fabric. Jacobs Wells Baths should adopt a similarly restrained approach, removing compromising alterations and introducing clearly contemporary interventions (Trinity Bristol, n.d.).



Community Engagement to Date

Workshops, Events and Co-Design



Key Takeaways

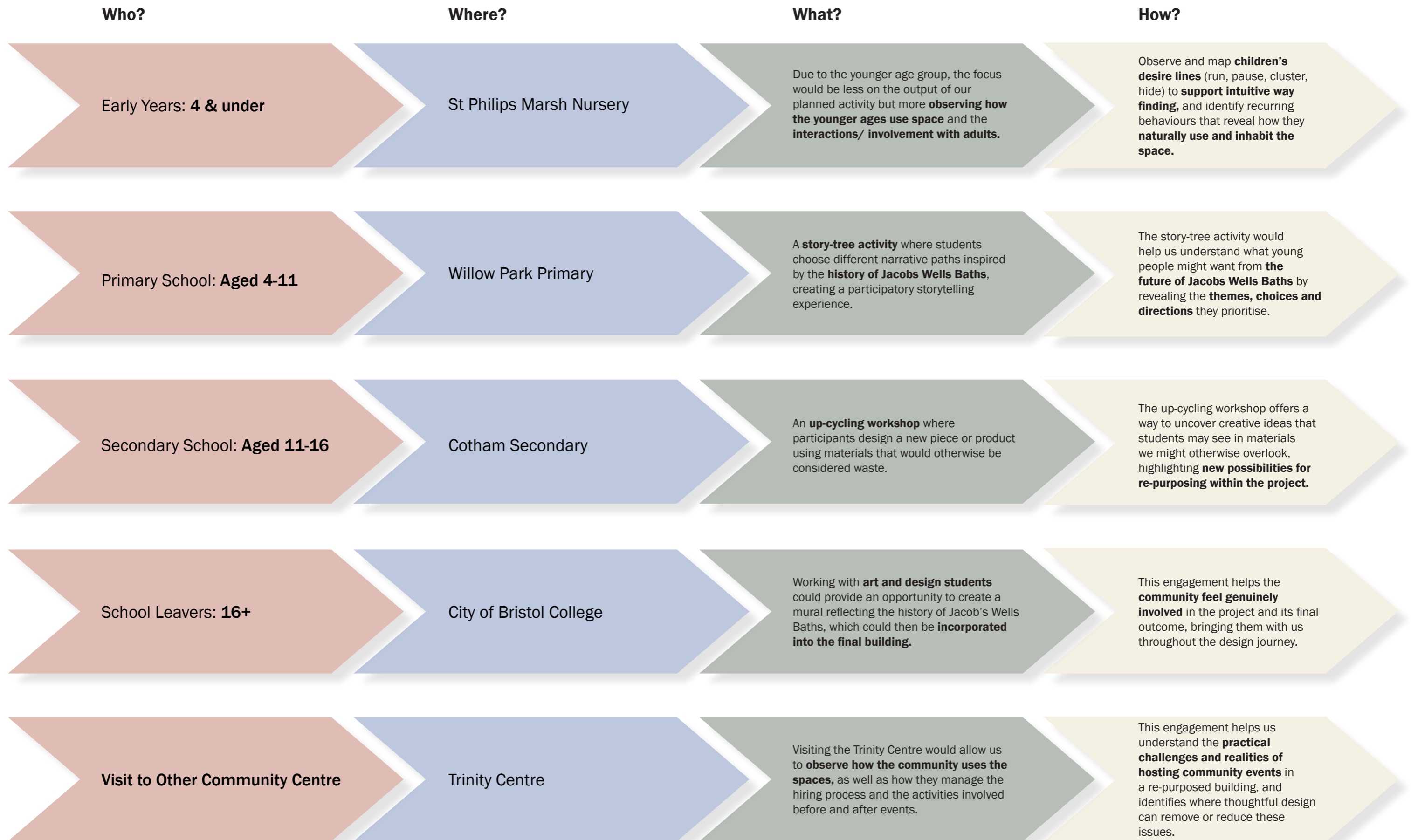
- Potential engagement with early years groups, including nursery and pre-school children.
- Observing how young people use and navigate the space beyond the planned activities.
- Opportunities for young people to contribute to the final design of the building.

Future Engagement Strategy

Next Phase of Community Involvement

Why?

Our research shows that the next stage is further engagement with future users to **address the gaps in previous activity**. Hearing from young people of all ages, parents and cultural communities will help shape a youth hub and community space that genuinely reflects their needs. We also want to understand how young people use space so the design can support them effectively. Ultimately, **we hope to learn what the youth of Bristol want from this future space**.



Experiential Design Brief

Spatial Strategy and Urban Context

Users and Building Use

Civic Role:

Jacobs Wells Baths will be re-imagined as contemporary civic infrastructure for young people. The proposal will respond to the shortage of accessible youth space in central Bristol while continuing the building's long tradition of public use.

Programme Approach:

Rather than reinstating swimming, the building will support learning, social interaction and creative activity. Spaces will be flexible and able to accommodate changing needs over time rather than a single fixed function.

Primary Users:

The main users will be young people across a broad age range, including students and culturally diverse communities in the Hotwells and Harbourside area. The design will recognise varying levels of English proficiency and will prioritise a safe, welcoming environment.

Shared Use:

Although youth-focused, the building will remain open to the wider community. This will ensure the Baths function as a shared civic resource throughout the day rather than a single-purpose facility.

Yard and Outdoor Space

The small external area will be reactivated with planting and defined use. Design responses will address noise, enclosure and safety due to proximity to Jacob's Wells Road.

Main Volume

The primary hall will remain a single, open space with strong daylight from the roof lantern. Existing features such as ceramic tiles will be retained and expressed, reinforcing the building's historic identity.

Building Strategy

Targeted interventions to make the building usable, accessible and easy to understand while preserving its historic spatial character. New elements are precise and reversible, enabling contemporary use without major alteration to the existing fabric.

Flexibility

Spaces will be designed for multiple uses and changing occupancy throughout the day, supporting overlapping activities without requiring permanent subdivision.

Urban Presence

The proposal will address the building's current isolation by strengthening visual presence and public recognition within the neighbourhood.

Circulation

Improved internal movement will be achieved through accessible vertical circulation alongside existing stairs, allowing all users to access multiple levels of the building.

Wider Context Strategy

Enhanced Pedestrian Connections:

Stronger and more direct links to the Harbourside and nearby neighbourhood routes will improve accessibility and integration with the wider urban network.

Way-finding and Legibility:

Clear routes and visual cues will help users locate and approach the building from surrounding streets.

Safe and Accessible Approaches:

Access routes will be re-designed to be safer, more comfortable and easier to navigate for all users.

Lighting and Visibility:

Strategic lighting will improve night-time safety while highlighting the façade to increase awareness of the building's presence.

Civic Presence:

The building will be re-positioned as a recognisable public destination within the urban landscape.

Entrance and Welcome

A fully accessible entrance will create a clear and inclusive point of arrival. The threshold will provide space to pause and gather, acting as a buffer between the street and interior while improving visibility, safety and awareness of entry.

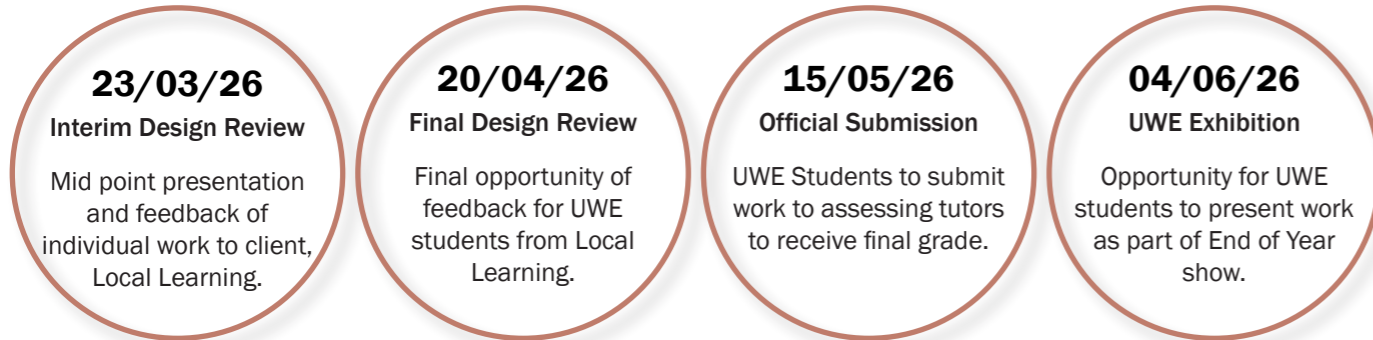
Project Aim

To bring Jacobs Wells Baths back into meaningful public use while respecting its historic character. The proposal responds to current community needs and promotes regular activity, helping to secure the building's long-term relevance, care and protection.

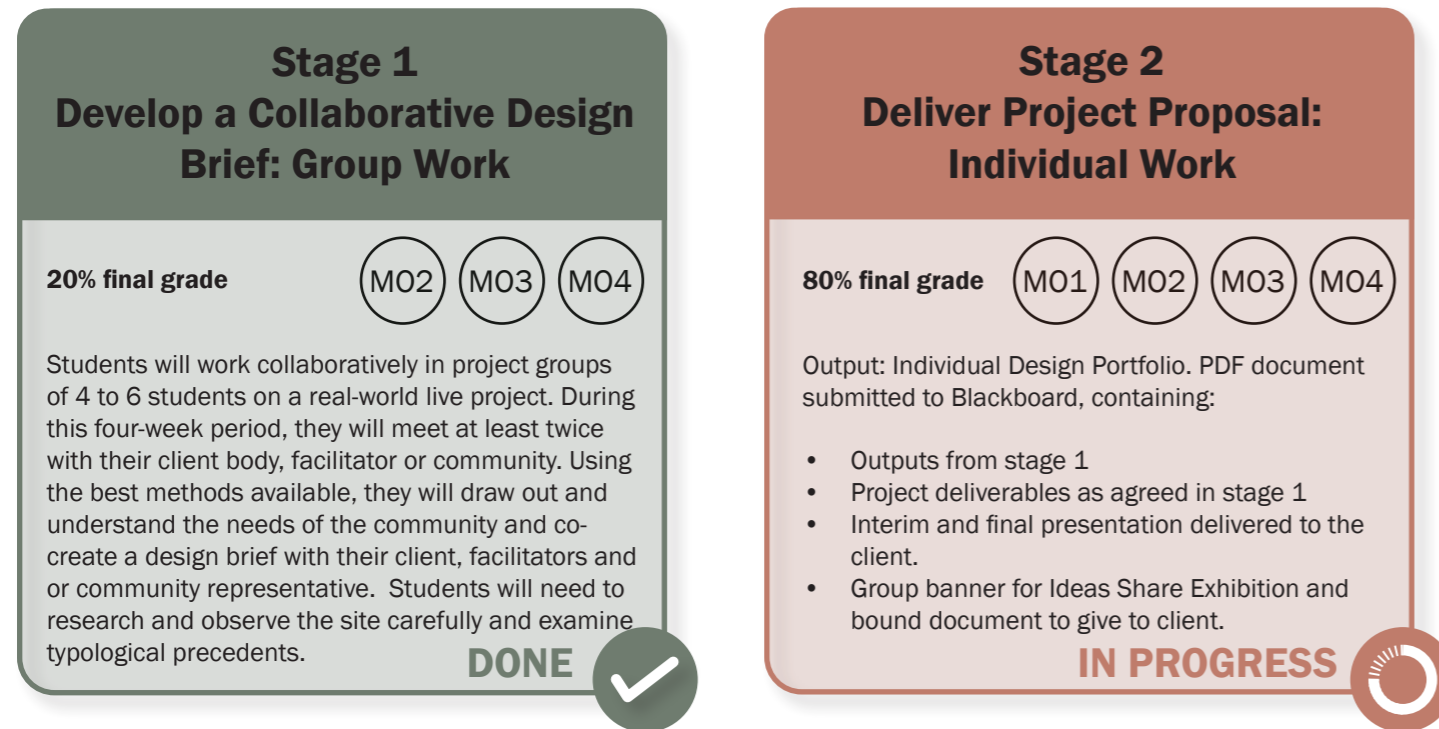
MArch Next Steps...

Dates, Outcomes & Assessments

Key Upcoming Dates



Stages of Work



Assessment Module Outcomes

- MO1** Engage with clients, and other stakeholders to develop an appropriate brief and agenda responding to user needs, constraints and opportunities that integrates cultural, environmental, and contextual insights. (Mapped ARB Outcomes: D2, RE2)
- MO2** Integrate cultural, environmental, and contextual knowledge to develop and communicate a complex design proposal that address the needs of clients and users, and the specific requirements of a site and its contexts (Mapped ARB Outcome: D1).
- MO3** Plan, implement, and document architectural project tasks effectively, both independently and collaboratively, to achieve defined goals within time and resource constraints (Mapped ARB Outcome: M10).
- MO4** Apply principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion in the design of environments and in building respectful, collaborative relationships with colleagues, clients, and communities (Mapped ARB Outcome: PE2).

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